

# Reviewing Our Charter: Research Findings



**EQUALITY, POVERTY AND SOCIAL SECURITY**

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# 1. Executive summary

This report sets out the research undertaken to review the Scottish Social Security Charter, “Our Charter”, and the Charter Measurement Framework. The Charter was created in 2018 and the framework was created the following year. The Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 requires the Charter to be reviewed every five years. The review took place during 2023 and was facilitated by researchers and officials from the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland.

## Research approach

Scoping activity identified strengths and weaknesses of the Charter and the framework. Key strengths were the co-design process used to design the documents and a positive influence on organisational culture in Social Security Scotland. Concerns were about the implementation of the Charter commitments and a mis-match between measures in the framework and how Social Security Scotland delivers in practice.

It was a priority to deliver a review which met the legislative requirements set out in the Act. Overall, the review reflected on the existing Charter and highlighted areas for improvement and change, rather than attempting to start from scratch. Given the key strength of the original co-design approach, it was important that research activity followed a similar methodology. Although not part of the formal legislative requirements, the research also considered the Charter Measurement Framework. This ensured consistency and maintained the close link with the Charter.

## Research methodology

A co-design approach was taken to carry out the research and put people with experience of the Scottish social security system at the heart of the process. The review also included input from government officials, the Scottish Commission on Social Security, and research with staff from Social Security Scotland, and partner organisations. Research activities are outlined below.

- A group of around 35 officials in relevant areas across Social Security Scotland and the Social Security Directorate within the Scottish Government were asked for regular input throughout the research process.
- Five online focus groups were held with 26 staff from Social Security Scotland.
- Seven partner organisations took part in the research; five organisations responded to a survey and two took part in an interview.

- Over 850 Client Panels members took part in a survey about their views and priorities for the Charter.
- Five online workshops were held with a core group of client participants, the 'core client group'. Over the course of workshops, 16 participants took part in at least one session.
- A review of existing evidence was carried out to identify the known needs of clients from seldom heard groups.
- Interviews were carried out with 18 clients from seldom heard groups.
- Analysts and policy officials reviewed and updated the framework measures.

## **Proposed changes to the Charter**

Following an iterative approach, research findings were analysed throughout the research process and used to build and develop proposed changes to the Charter with the core group of client participants. By the end of the last workshop, the core client group had agreed a final set of proposed revisions.

Findings showed that the Charter continued to reflect values which align with the priorities of clients, staff, and partner organisations. All original commitments have been retained in some form in the proposed new version.

The original four sections have been retained but there is some suggested movement of commitments between sections compared to the original Charter. The wording of the sub-headings has been updated to make it clear who is responsible for delivering the commitments under each theme. These introductory lines have also been used in proposed new sub-sections to give more detail about how each sub-section relates to the overall theme of the section. The core client group agreed these structural changes improved the flow of the Charter and made it clearer what each section was focussed on.

Clients who took part in the research said the language used in the Charter should be specific and avoid vague, unclear statements. Language has been updated to use more active words in the present tense. The words and phrases used to describe Social Security Scotland processes have also been updated to align with agency language. For example, the word 'assessments' has been replaced with 'consultations'. Advice from Social Security Scotland communications colleagues was used to ensure the changes reflect the tone and 'voice' clients are familiar with from Social Security Scotland.

Changes to the wording of commitments, and the introduction of new commitments, reflects the priorities described by clients, staff and partner organisations. Changes were agreed by the core client group at the final workshop.

A key priority was to provide clients with more information on what they can expect from the social security system. New commitments have been proposed which outline the application journey.

Accountability was also a recurring theme across the research findings and is reflected in the proposed changes. Clients, staff and partner organisations all said it was vital that the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland could be held to account for delivering the Charter commitments. Changes have been included to provide more information about how performance and feedback are used to make improvements. Changes also include making it clearer how clients can raise issues if their rights aren't met and provide views about their experience.

Issues related to the theme of communication were another priority for clients, staff and partner organisations. Some revisions have been proposed to make it clearer how clients' communication needs are supported.

A final example of where changes have been made to reflect priorities identified from the research relates to information about support for clients. This includes support to engage with Social Security Scotland as well as links with other forms of support that may help clients.

## **Communicating the Charter**

There was mixed feedback about the awareness of the Charter and the framework. Among staff participants, familiarity varied although most remembered taking part in training about the Charter when they first started at Social Security Scotland. A third (33%) of client survey respondents said they were familiar with the Charter.

Overall, feedback was positive about the way the Charter is written. Partner organisations said it was clear and about the right length. On the types of documents client survey respondents would read about the Charter, over half (57%) said they would likely read a visual summary and just under half (48%) said a document of up to 5 pages of writing.

## **Additional information**

There was overall support for the addition of 'useful information' relevant to the Charter.

The core client group agreed a list of terms and phrases used in the proposed Charter where it would be helpful to see further information to help explain what they mean in practice. For example, 'Health and Social Care Practitioner' and 'Social Security Independent Advocacy Service'. There was a suggestion to include visual information about key processes such as the consultation, re-

determination and appeals processes. Across the research, clients who took part reiterated the need for better links between organisations who provide support. The core client group also agreed a list of links which they thought would be useful to include in the Charter. For example, to benefit checkers and how to get in touch with Social Security Scotland.

## **Charter Measurement Framework**

Within Social Security Scotland, the Charter Measurement and Client Panels team lead on producing the annual framework publication. This team provided an overview of each measure in the first three sections of the framework and their reflections on issues which have affected reporting. Scottish Government policy officials provided input on potential changes to section four of the framework. A number of areas for potential improvement were identified. The findings from discussions with staff were used to develop a set of criteria for reviewing and updating the framework. These criteria were discussed by the core client group at workshop four with broad support for the approach.

It is important that the measures in the framework are updated to reflect changes to the Charter. Proposed changes also include removing duplication, better alignment with existing management information, and reducing burden on research participants and staff.

## **What's next**

The findings in this report and the proposed revised Charter have been shared with officials across the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland. The introductory text and design of the Charter document will be updated by Social Security Scotland. Proposed changes to the Charter will be laid to the Scottish Parliament in early 2024. Updates to the Charter Measurement Framework will be finalised once the revised Charter has been agreed.



## 2. Introduction

This report presents the output and findings from research undertaken to review the Scottish Social Security Charter, “Our Charter”, and the Charter Measurement Framework. Respectively, these are referred to as ‘the Charter’ and ‘the framework’ throughout this report.

The Charter was created in 2018 and the framework was created the following year. The Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 requires the Charter to be reviewed every five years. The review took place during 2023 and was facilitated by researchers and officials from the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland.

A co-design approach was taken to carry out the research. Co-design brings together input from, and shares power between, policy makers, individuals and organisations who have experience and expertise on an issue. This methodology reflects the approach taken to create both the Charter and the framework.

The co-design approach to the review put people with experience of the Scottish social security system at the heart of the process. These participants were recruited from Social Security Scotland’s Client Panels and have experience of making an application or receiving a payment. The review also included input from government officials, the Scottish Commission on Social Security, staff from Social Security Scotland, and partner organisations.

The next section sets out background information about the Charter and the framework. The output of the research process, a proposed revised Charter, is set out at section four below. Section five presents an overview of the proposed changes. The remainder of the report describes the research activities with clients, staff, and partners and how their input shaped the outputs from the review.

## 3. Background

This section covers background information on the creation and content of the Charter and the Charter Measurement Framework.

### 3.1 Creating the Charter and Charter Measurement Framework

The Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 set out the legislative framework and the principles for how the Scottish Government would deliver social security benefits in Scotland.<sup>1</sup> The Act required a charter to be created that reflected these principles. The Act set out that the charter should be designed in consultation with people who have experience of social security and the organisations that represent them.

The Charter was created through a comprehensive co-design process. Input from prospective Social Security Scotland clients was at the heart of the process. Research included a series of workshops with a group of around 30 members of the Scottish Government Experience Panels.<sup>2</sup> These participants had experience of the benefits due to be transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to Social Security Scotland. The co-design process also included input from a range of professionals who offered expertise on relevant topics, partner organisations, and a debate in the Scottish Parliament. Two research reports were published which describe the co-design process.<sup>3</sup> The Scottish Social Security Charter, “Our Charter”, was approved by the Scottish Parliament and published in 2019.<sup>4</sup>

After the parliamentary process to approve the Charter, work began to design a framework to monitor how the Charter commitments were being delivered. Following a similar co-design approach, a group of people with lived experience of the social security system were again at the heart of the process to design the framework. These participants were members of the Experience Panels and there was some overlap with the group who had been involved in the creation of the Charter. A research report was published which

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<sup>1</sup> The Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018: [Social Security \(Scotland\) Act 2018 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

<sup>2</sup> For more information about the Experience Panels and reports of the research carried out with the panels see: [Social Security Experience Panels: publications - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

<sup>3</sup> Designing the Social Security Charter: Report on the first stage of work (2018): [Designing the Social Security Charter: report on the first stage of work - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot) and Developing the Scottish Social Security Charter – Co-design in action (2019): [Supporting documents - Developing the Social Security Charter: co-design process - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

<sup>4</sup> The Scottish Parliament approved the Charter in February 2019. Our Charter: [Social Security Scotland: our charter - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

details the process of developing the framework.<sup>5</sup> The Charter Measurement Framework was published in 2019.<sup>6</sup>

## **3.2 Overview of Our Charter and Charter Measurement Framework**

The Charter sets out what the social security principles mean in practice and is made up of a series of commitments to be delivered by the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland. The commitments are short statements which describe the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of the delivery of the social security system. There are around 50 commitments, grouped in four sections. An outline of each of the sections is described below:

1. A people’s service: this section covers the responsibilities of Social Security Scotland staff and clients.
2. Processes that work: this section relates to the processes involved in delivering benefits.
3. A learning system: this section focusses on the culture of the social security system.
4. A better future: this section covers the role of government.

Since it was created, Our Charter has been embedded in all aspects of the social security system. Social Security Scotland began delivering benefits in 2018 and since the beginning, the Charter has helped to shape the culture and service of the agency. For example, Social Security Scotland staff receive training to understand the Charter and their responsibilities as set out in the commitment and the Charter is available in various formats. The full range of activity to deliver the Charter commitments is reported each year in the Charter Measurement Framework.

Since 2019, the Charter Measurement Framework has been published annually by Social Security Scotland. The framework is a comprehensive list of measures relating to the commitments in Our Charter. The framework is divided into four sections that correspond with the sections of the Charter. Each section describes ideal outcomes and a list of measures which show whether these are being achieved. The framework shows how Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government are delivering the Charter commitments and helps them improve.

Officials and analysts from the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland carry out work to monitor, report on, and evaluate how social security

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<sup>5</sup> Developing a measurement framework for the Social Security Charter in Scotland: Analytical co-design in action (2019): [Social Security Charter measurement framework: co-design process - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-charter-measurement-framework-co-design-process-2019/pages/12_to_14.aspx)

<sup>6</sup> Social Security Charter: Measurement framework (2019): [Social Security Charter: measurement framework - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-charter-measurement-framework-2019/pages/12_to_14.aspx)

is being delivered in Scotland. For example, Social Security Scotland produces a range of information about how benefits are being delivered and how clients are experiencing the service.

Each year, the Charter Measurement Framework is filled in using information from these and a range of other sources. The information in the framework covers the previous financial year. To date, four frameworks have been published covering the period 2019-20 to 2022-23.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Links to published frameworks can be found on the Social Security Scotland website here: [Social Security Scotland - Our Charter](#)

## 4. Proposed revised Charter

This section presents the output of the research process – a proposed revised Charter. The original Charter can be read online: [Social Security Scotland: our charter - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/charter). The final recommendations presented to Parliament may include some amendments made following final discussions between Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland officials.

### **Section 1: A People's Service: We're here to help you get everything you're entitled to.**

#### **Our colleagues and culture**

##### **Social Security Scotland colleagues will:**

1. Be patient, kind and consider how you might be feeling.
2. Listen to you, trust you and treat you as an individual.
3. Support your wellbeing and make your contact with us as positive and stress-free as possible.
4. Treat everyone equally, fairly and without discrimination.
5. Be knowledgeable about social security and help you get answers if they do not know.

##### **We'll achieve this by:**

6. Including requirements in our recruitment criteria and questions to make sure we recruit people who care about delivering a service based on dignity, fairness and respect.
7. Building a workforce that reflects the diversity of people in Scotland.
8. Making sure colleagues are trained, supported and well-equipped to do their jobs in line with our values.
9. Providing training to ensure colleagues understand the needs of different people and the barriers they face – so that no-one experiences discrimination because of who they are.
10. Involving people with diverse lived experiences of social security, and the organisations that represent them, in training our colleagues.

## **How we support you**

### **Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government will meet your individual needs by:**

11. Providing information in different formats and languages and communicating with you in ways that meet your needs as much as we can. For example, by providing interpreters.
12. Delivering in-person, local services that are convenient, welcoming and accessible for you. For example, home visits if appropriate.

### **Social Security Scotland will help you get support from outside organisations if you need it. We'll:**

13. Refer you to a free and independent advocacy service. If you have a disability, this service can help you to understand and be involved in decisions which affect you. You can also ask someone that you know to support you.
14. If you want someone, or an organisation, to support you with your application or contact with us, with your permission we will make this as straightforward as possible.
15. Direct you towards other organisations and services that may be able to give advice or guidance.
16. Tell you if we think you might be entitled to benefits, services or help not delivered by Social Security Scotland and how to find out if you are eligible.

### **You can help us by:**

17. Treating our colleagues with dignity, fairness and respect.
18. Telling us how we can make it easier for you to use our service. For example, if you have communication or cultural needs – we'll do our best to meet them.

## **Section 2: Processes that work: We'll design services with the people who use them.**

**If you go through an application process, Social Security Scotland will support you along the way, keeping you updated and explaining what will happen and why. We'll do this by:**

1. Supporting you to complete an application in a way that suits you for example, online, over the phone or in-person if appropriate.
2. Letting you know that we have received your application and what you can expect to happen next.
3. Working with you to gather any supporting information we need so that your application can be processed as quickly as possible. This includes being clear about the supporting information needed and helping as much as possible to gather that information, if you're unable to easily provide it yourself.
4. Introducing ways to update you on the progress of your application and expected timelines, including if things might take a bit longer.
5. Contacting you to help clarify information in your application and making decisions based on your application and supporting information whenever possible.
6. Having a dedicated team of decision makers who will review the information provided in your application and supporting information, and who will work closely with Social Security Scotland's qualified health and social care practitioner team as needed.
7. Only carrying out a consultation for disability benefits when we're not able to decide based on the information that is already available or if you request one.
8. Making sure that when consultations are needed, they are carried out by a qualified Social Security Scotland health and social care practitioner who understands your condition and the impact it's having on you.
9. Making sure consultations are carried out in a way that puts your wellbeing first, including offering a consultation over the phone or in person, at a place that suits you.

10. Providing information to help answer any questions you may have along the way and responding to enquiries as quickly as we can.

**Throughout, Social Security Scotland will make sure you are treated with dignity, fairness and respect. We'll:**

11. Make decisions in a way that is consistent and accurate – and aim to get them right first time.
12. Be honest, give clear reasons for decisions and explain what to do if you disagree.
13. Pay you the right amount, on time.

**If you do not agree with a decision made, we'll:**

14. Look at your application again. This is usually called a re-determination. When we do this someone different will look at it as if it was a completely new application.
15. Explain how you can appeal if you still do not think the right decision has been made after we have looked at it again.
16. Continue to pay you at the same level if you challenge a decision to reduce or stop certain benefits you receive. This is called "Short-term Assistance" and you do not need to pay this back.

**You can help us by:**

17. Giving us the information we need to help you. This includes working with us to gather any supporting information needed to help us come to the right decision on your application.
18. Telling us about any problems with getting this information that we might be able to help with.
19. Telling us if something changes that might affect your entitlement, so that we can make sure you're getting the right payments.



**Section 3: A learning system: We'll encourage feedback and work to deliver the best service possible.**

**Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government will improve our services by listening to the people who use them. We'll:**

1. Make communications, processes and systems as simple and clear as possible by testing them with the people who will use them.
2. Encourage you to provide feedback, explain how you can complain and do everything we can to make things right.
3. Listen, learn and improve by owning up to mistakes and valuing feedback, complaints and appeal decisions.
4. Carry out regular research with clients to hear about their experiences and work with them to make improvements to our services. This includes a survey that goes to all clients.
5. Involve people using the service in measuring how well it works – including the commitments in Our Charter.

**Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government will be held to account by:**

6. Creating a culture of trust by being open and transparent.
7. Encouraging colleagues to speak up when they feel we could provide a better service.
8. Working with other organisations to make sure services and policy are joined up to provide the best possible help and support.
9. Encouraging other organisations working in social security to adopt the approach described in Our Charter.
10. Measuring each year how we are delivering the commitments in Our Charter and taking lessons learnt from this into future improvements to our services.
11. Communicating how we're performing on these commitments to clients and partner organisations.
12. Working with the Scottish Commission on Social Security who provide independent scrutiny of the Scottish social security system.

## **You can help us by:**

13. Telling us how you feel about the service. We always want to get better, and your ideas can help us do that. Details of how to do this are at the start of Our Charter.

## **Section 4: A better future: We'll invest in the people of Scotland – making a positive difference to all our lives.**

### **When making decisions that affect social security in Scotland, the Scottish Government will:**

1. Embed the social security principles and Our Charter in the policymaking process.
2. Involve people with diverse lived experiences of social security in developing policy.
3. Develop policy that seeks to advance equality, non-discrimination and the human right to social security as defined in laws, treaties and guidance.

### **The Scottish Government will use social security powers to contribute towards tackling poverty by:**

4. Looking for ways to make eligibility rules fairer and consider creating new benefits to meet people's changing needs.
5. Increasing the value of disability, employment-injury, carers, funeral expense benefits and the Scottish Child Payment every year in line with inflation.
6. Reviewing the payment levels of all other Scottish benefits every year.
7. Making sure as many people as possible get what they are entitled to by delivering on the principles set out in the Benefit Take-up Strategy.
8. Reaching people who are most likely to be excluded including by providing information about social security in community locations.
9. Working with other public services to support delivery of the Scottish Government's National Outcomes for a fairer, more prosperous Scotland.
10. Putting people first as we deliver an efficient service and deliver value for money for the people of Scotland.

**The Scottish Government will use social security to advance equality and human rights by:**

11. Using social security powers to help make sure people can play a full and active part in society.
12. Promoting a positive view of social security as a human right and a public service to be proud of.
13. Publicly challenging myths about social security and stereotypes about the people who use it, focussing on using more positive words to describe both.

## 5. Summary of proposed changes to the Charter

This section provides an overview of the proposed changes to the Charter developed during the research process. A copy of the proposed revised Charter is at section four above. Throughout this report, the changes are referred to as “proposed changes” to reflect that the final revised Charter must be agreed by the Scottish Parliament before it is implemented.

The proposed changes were developed through an iterative process. This means that as the research progressed, ongoing changes were made to reflect the input and feedback received from stakeholder groups. The goal of this process was to build towards a final draft which would be agreed by the core client group.

During the first phase of research, researchers and officials reviewed findings to identify areas of focus which were shared with the core client group during the online workshops. Changes to the wording of commitments and the development of new commitments were drafted in collaboration with the core client group. Again, these changes were agreed through an iterative process; changes were developed through workshop discussions and from suggestions from the core client group. Researchers collated and refined changes and shared back with the participants who said if they agreed, if anything was missing, or if further changes were needed.

### 5.1 Overview

Findings from the research show that the Charter continued to reflect values which align with the priorities of clients, staff, and partner organisations. As such, all original commitments have been retained in some form in the proposed new version. Some have retained the exact wording used in the original Charter. Some have been brought together to avoid duplication. Where commitments have been reworded, the core meaning has been retained from the original statement. A small number of new commitments have been proposed.

The original four sections of the Charter have been retained. The points below summarise the key changes in each section:

1. A people’s service: Continues to focus on how clients are treated and how Social Security Scotland and clients can work together. Restructured into five sub-sections. Some commitments previously in sections two and three have been moved to this section. A new commitment has been proposed

to give clients more information about receiving support with their interactions with Social Security Scotland.

2. Processes that work: this section continues to focus the processes involved in delivering benefits. Restructured into four sub-sections covering the application and decision-making processes. Six new commitments have been proposed to outline what clients can expect from the application process.
3. A learning system: this section continues to focus on the culture of the social security system and using feedback to improve. A couple of commitments previously in other sections have been moved to this section. Three new commitments have been proposed to provide more information about ongoing research with clients, communicating performance and working with the Scottish Commission on Social Security.
4. A better future: this section covers the role of government. Fewer revisions overall. Restructured into three sub-sections. One new commitment proposed about providing information about social security at community locations.

The sections below provide more information about the proposed changes grouped under three themes: changes to the structure, updates to the language, and changes to commitments to reflect the priorities of the stakeholder groups. The final sections outlines additional 'useful information' identified by participants and concerns about how this is communicated to clients. Examples of changes are used below to illustrate revisions but are not exhaustive. Charter commitments, both original and proposed, are presented in boxes.

## **5.2 Structure**

The proposed revised Charter remains divided into four sections. New sub-headings have been added to group commitments relating to similar themes. There has also been some movement of commitments between sections compared to the original Charter. The core client group agreed that this helped improve the flow of the Charter and made the focus of each section clearer.

The wording of the sub-headings has been updated to make it clear who is responsible for delivering the commitments under each theme. In the original Charter, each section began with an introductory line stating who was responsible for delivering the commitments listed in the section. For each of the first three sections, this was both the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland. It is proposed these are updated to name Social Security Scotland in sections one and two then both organisations in section three.

These introductory lines have also been used in the proposed new sub-sections to give a little more detail about how each sub-section relates to the overall theme of the section.

Sub-sections have been added to sections two and three to outline how clients can help Social Security Scotland to deliver its service. These “you can help us by” sub-sections mirror the “please help us by” sub-section in the first section of the original Charter. These sections illustrate how clients can help Social Security Scotland deliver processes and be a learning system.

Compared to the original Charter, section two has more proposed restructuring than the other sections. The commitments in this section now focus on clients’ application journey, reflecting the priorities raised by clients throughout the research.

### **5.3 Language**

The language used in the Charter has been updated to use more active words in the present tense. This reflects that Social Security Scotland has now been operating for five years and it is no longer helpful to talk about service delivery in the future tense. For example, ‘work with’ has been replaced by ‘working with’ and ‘use’ has been replaced by ‘using’.

The words and phrases used to describe Social Security Scotland processes have also been updated to align with agency language. This includes replacing the word ‘assessments’ with ‘consultations’ and the phrase ‘face to face’ with ‘in-person’. Other terms have been introduced which are used in social security policy and by Social Security Scotland such as, ‘health and social care practitioners’ and ‘Short-term Assistance’. Participants in the core client group were particularly positive about the change from ‘staff’ to ‘colleagues’ in commitments about Social Security Scotland officials. Participants said the new term felt inclusive.

Advice from Social Security Scotland communications colleagues has been used to improve the overall readability of the proposed changes. This helps to make sure the Charter is as easy to read as possible and reflects the tone and ‘voice’ clients are familiar with from Social Security Scotland. For example, contractions have been used such as ‘we’ll’ and ‘we’re’.

### **5.4 Reflecting key priorities**

Updates to the wording of commitments, and the introduction of new commitments, reflects the priorities described by clients, staff and partner organisations.

A key priority was to provide clients with more information on what they can expect from the social security system. As well as updates to language to align with Social Security Scotland terminology, new commitments have been proposed which outline the application journey. These commitments elaborate on an original commitment which said clients would be supported to make applications and updated throughout the process. The original commitment and examples of the new commitments are below.

Commitment 1.4 Support you through your application, keeping you updated and explaining what will happen and why.

Proposed new commitment: Supporting you to complete an application in a way that suits you for example, online, over the phone or in-person if appropriate.

Proposed new commitment: Introducing ways to update you on the progress of your application and expected timelines, including if things might take a bit longer.

The original commitment covered multiple aspects of the application process. The proposed new commitments set out more detail on what clients can expect at each stage of the process. Throughout the research, clients said that updates would help ease uncertainty and concern about the progress of applications. More detail on how clients are supported to make applications was a priority for many clients from seldom heard groups.

Accountability was also a recurring theme across the research findings. Clients, staff and partner organisations all said it was vital that the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland could be held to account for delivering the Charter commitments. This included by providing information about performance and using feedback to make improvements. It also included making it clearer how clients can raise issues if their rights aren't met and provide views about their experience. Updates have been proposed which address these issues. For example, revisions have been proposed to an original commitment about how clients can give feedback. The original and revised commitments are below.

Commitment: Telling us how you feel about the service. We always want to get better and your ideas can help us do that.

Proposed revision: Telling us how you feel about the service. We always want to get better, and your ideas can help us do that. Details of how to do this are at the start of the Charter.

The addition of new wording directs clients to the introduction of the Charter where details are listed about how to get in touch with Social Security

Scotland. The revised commitment has also been moved to a new “you can help us by” sub-section in Section three: A learning system.

Another example of where revisions have been proposed to provide further detail on accountability are commitments related to the Charter Measurement Framework. The original and revised commitments are below.

Commitment 4.15 Develop ways of measuring how we are doing against the commitments in Our Charter.

Proposed revision: Measuring each year how we are delivering the commitments in Our Charter and taking lessons learnt from this into future improvements to our services.

The original statement reflected a commitment to develop and implement a measurement framework which would go on to be designed the following year. The proposed revisions to the commitment update the wording to the present tense and add detail about how performance feeds into continuous improvement.

Related to accountability, findings showed that *how* commitments are delivered was another important priority. For example, the core client group agreed that it was helpful to add detail to the original commitment about recruiting a Social Security Scotland workforce that cares about delivering a service in line with values. The original and revised commitments are below.

Commitment 1.12 Recruit people who care about delivering a service based on equality, respect, dignity and human rights.

Proposed revision: Including requirements in our recruitment criteria and questions to make sure we recruit people who care about delivering a service based on dignity, fairness and respect.

Clients said it was important to know what “recruit people” meant in practice. The group agreed the proposed rewording made it clearer for people to understand how this commitment would be delivered in practice. The wording had also been updated to reflect Social Security Scotland’s motto, ‘Dignity, Fairness, and Respect’.

Issues related to the theme of communication were another priority for clients, staff and partner organisations. Some revisions have been proposed to make it clearer how communication needs are supported. An example of this is an update to an original commitment about adapting communication to meet client needs. The original and revised commitments are below.



Commitment 2.3 Adapt processes and ways of communicating as much as we reasonably can to meet your needs and preferences, for example by providing interpreters.

Proposed revision: Providing information in different formats and languages and communication with you in ways that meet your needs as much as we can. For example, by providing interpreters.

The proposed revisions give clients more details about what they can expect from communication with Social Security Scotland. This was highlighted as especially important by participants from seldom heard groups, including those who have English as a second language.

A final example of where changes have been made to reflect priorities identified from the research relates to information about support for clients. This includes support to engage with Social Security Scotland as well as links with other forms of support that may help clients. A new commitment has been proposed to provide clients with information about how others can support their interactions with Social Security Scotland. The proposed new commitment is below.

Proposed new commitment: If you want someone, or an organisation, to support you with your application or contact with us, with your permission we'll make this as straightforward as possible.

This commitment reflects feedback from staff, partner organisations and members of the Research Advisory Group. Social Security Scotland must collect permission from clients to discuss their details with other individuals or organisations. The commitment reflects this part of the process and also an intention from Social Security Scotland to make the process as easy as possible for clients.

## **5.5 Summary of additional information for clients**

Clients who took part in the research identified the need for additional information to help support clients when reading the Charter. The sections below provide an overview of the information participants said they would like to see included.

### **5.5.1 Glossary**

The core client group agreed a list of terms and phrases used in the proposed Charter where it would be helpful to see further information to help explain what they mean in practice.

These were:

- Benefit Take-up Strategy
- Consultation
- Decision making team
- Health and Social Care Practitioner
- Independent organisation
- Local services
- National Outcomes
- Referral
- Related benefits
- Short-term Assistance
- Social Security Independent Advocacy Service
- Supporting information
- Value for money

#### 5.5.2 Information about Social Security Scotland processes

Information about key processes was also suggested by the core client group. This would be visual information such as flowcharts or process maps. The processes below were identified as part of these discussions:

- Application process
- Process from receiving benefits that do not need an application
- Consultation process
- Re-determination and appeals processes

#### 5.5.3 Helpful links

The core client group agreed a list of links which they thought would be useful to include in the Charter. The introduction of the original Charter contains information about how social security is delivered. An asterisk\* indicates where this information was previously, or could be, provided in the introduction of the Charter. The suggested links were:

- Eligibility checkers
- Links to other organisations that can provide support e.g. Welfare Rights and Citizens Advice
- How to get in touch with Social Security Scotland\*
- How to provide feedback or make a complaint\*
- How the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland measure how they are performing against Our Charter\*
- The Social Security Principles\*

## 5.6 Communicating the additional information

The core client group raised a number of questions about how the information would be communicated with clients. Regarding additional information overall, participants were concerned about how the information could be provided without making the Charter document too long.

Participants were keen to know how it would be indicated that a term or phrase was included in the glossary. For example, bold or underlined text, or a hyperlink. There was also a concern about how any additional information would be included in different formats of the Charter. For example, if hyperlinks were used, there was a concern about what this would mean for paper copies of the Charter. One participant said with regards to presentation “the more visual the better”. Others said it was important the information was easy to understand and took into account the range of client needs.

Views were ultimately mixed on whether additional information was necessary and how it should be presented. There was general support for both the glossary of terms and helpful links. Findings were less clear about whether information on processes was needed. This echoed concerns raised by staff involved in providing ongoing feedback to the review process. There were concerns about the information becoming out of date and about how it could take into account different benefits and individual circumstances. Some participants also said that the proposed revised and new commitments in Section two: Processes that work provided sufficient detail about Social Security Scotland’s processes. Participants also said it was important not to dilute the intended purpose of the Charter to focus on values and rights.

## 6. Approach to reviewing the Charter

The Social Security (Scotland) Act requires that the Charter be reviewed every five years and sets out a list of requirements as to who that review should include. In practice, the requirements mean that Social Security Scotland partner organisations and clients should be involved, as well as the Scottish Commission on Social Security.

The Scottish Commission on Social Security (SCoSS) is an independent body that provides expert scrutiny of the Scottish social security system.<sup>8</sup> Part of the remit of SCoSS is to report to Scottish Ministers and the Scottish Parliament on the Charter. This includes how the commitments in the Charter are being met and to take part in reviews. Officials held a preliminary meeting with SCoSS at beginning of the review process. SCoSS confirmed that they would engage with and support the review of the Charter through a process led by government officials and researchers rather than conducting a separate exercise.

Researchers carried out initial work, 'scoping activity', to identify priorities and areas of consideration for the review. The aims of this work were to better understand key issues and concerns about how the Charter and Charter Measurement Framework were working. Scoping activity was also used to define how research activity would be carried out and what it would cover.

This section describes the findings from this initial work and how they were used to design the approach to reviewing the Charter.

### 6.1 Scoping activity

There were two strands to the initial scoping activity. Firstly, researchers held discussions with relevant staff from the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland. Researchers also conducted a review of external analysis of the Charter.

Discussions were held with around 20 officials from both the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland. The staff involved at this stage had roles which are directly related to the Charter and the framework. These staff included researchers, statisticians and other analysts who produce data relating to the social security system in Scotland. Other officials who took part included those who work on the development of social security policy, in roles relating to the governance of Social Security Scotland, as well as corporate communications.

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<sup>8</sup> More information about the Scottish Commission on Social Security can be found online here: [Home - Scottish Commission on Social Security \(socialsecuritycommission.scot\)](https://socialsecuritycommission.scot)

A review of analysis of the Charter included published reports from 2019 to 2022 from a range of external organisations including public bodies and the third sector.<sup>9</sup>

The following sections set out key strengths and concerns identified through the scoping activity.

## 6.2 Views on the Charter and framework – strengths

External analysis of the Charter identified that strengths lay in the co-design process and the central role played by participants with lived experience in this. In written evidence to the Social Security Committee in 2019, Citizens Advice Scotland highlighted the importance of involving those with lived experience in the design of the social security system.

“[Citizens Advice Scotland] welcomes the Charter being co-designed with people with lived experience of the social security system, which we would consider essential to it being meaningful.”<sup>10</sup>

A further strength was the value of the framework as a way to ensure regular monitoring and reporting on how the Charter commitments are being delivered. In 2022, the Equality and Human Rights Commission looked at the Charter as part of a wider review of evidence about the extent to which covenants and charters improve people’s lives. The Charter Measurement Framework was highlighted as a strong example of how to evidence the way commitments are delivered and make an impact on people’s lives.

“The Social Security Charter mandates measuring the commitments in the charter. This is done through a Charter Measurement Framework which was co-created after the Charter was published, and gathers evidence about progress against individual commitments as well as impact on service users... Of the covenants and charters identified in the literature review, the Social Security Charter therefore provides the most direct evidence of impact in terms of improving people’s lives.”<sup>11</sup>

In discussions with staff, there was positive feedback that the Charter works well and has successfully shaped a positive organisational culture in Social Security Scotland. There was strong sense of organisational pride around the inclusive, person-centred culture within the agency, and of “doing things differently”, that was linked back to the Charter. Many staff also felt that the Charter was received positively in their interactions with partner organisations and clients.

<sup>9</sup> See Annex A for a list of sources included in the review.

<sup>10</sup> Citizens Advice Scotland, [‘The draft Scottish social security Charter: written evidence from Citizens Advice Scotland’ \(2019\)](#), p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission, [‘A review of social covenants’ \(2022\)](#), p. 11.

This feedback mirrors findings from research carried out with Social Security Scotland staff as part of the annual reporting of the framework. Findings show the fundamental role played by the values in the Charter in influencing the culture and ways of working in Social Security Scotland.

“The main reason I joined [Social Security Scotland] was dignity, fairness and respect.”<sup>12</sup>

“Almost all (96%) staff respondents said they felt confident or very confident to deliver a service in line with Our Charter. Respondents were asked what had helped them to feel confident. Many said the values set out in Our Charter were reflected in staff attitudes and ways of working. Comments said there was a strong awareness of and respect for the values in Our Charter. Some comments mentioned training to understand the commitments made in Our Charter and how to apply them in their day-to-day work.”<sup>13</sup>

### 6.3 Views on the Charter and framework – concerns

There was a concern among staff that the Charter may be being drawn on less in policy making than it was at the outset. The Benefit Take-up Strategy was given as an example of this. Staff highlighted that whilst the original strategy drew heavily on the Charter, subsequent strategies have built on previous versions without going back to the Charter commitments.<sup>14</sup>

Staff raised some concerns that Social Security Scotland’s culture, as shaped by the values in the Charter, could gradually shift or be diluted over time. This included a concern about the potential impacts of a high proportion of staff coming from the DWP. There was a concern that there could be a gradual cultural shift away from the values in the Charter and closer to DWP ways of working if staff did not regularly use the Charter to guide their approaches. The “ask your neighbour” aspect of staff learning could pose this risk and staff felt there was a need to guard against this type of cultural slippage.

Regarding the Charter Measurement Framework, there was some concern raised by staff about a potential mismatch between the framework measures and the operation of Social Security Scotland. For example, the availability of management information and other data. This did not mean that the Charter commitments weren’t being delivered, but that the way the commitments were required to be measured did not give a helpful representation of organisational performance. Moreover, some measures required disproportionate resource

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<sup>12</sup> Social Security Scotland Charter Research 2021-2022 (2022): [Social Security Scotland Charter Research 2021-2022](#) (2022), p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> Social Security Scotland Charter Research 2020-2021 (2021): [Social Security Scotland Charter Research 2020-2021](#) (2021), p. 28.

<sup>14</sup> More information about the Scottish Government’s Benefit Take-up Strategy and links to published strategies can be found online here: [Benefit take up - Social security - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

to collate and report data to evidence performance, often in multiple ways across the framework. Staff highlighted that this was leading to poor utilisation of analytical resource. There was also feedback that the framework is a long and relatively complex document, which requires a detailed understanding of various data and the operational practice of Social Security Scotland.

In the early discussions with staff, there were also some concerns about the nature and scope of the review process itself. There was a concern that the review found the right “balance” within the Charter given the evolving roll-out of social security in Scotland. The Charter was designed before Social Security Scotland was operational and is written in that context. In the years since 2018, the agency has developed and grown, and will continue to do so, as the focus of the system moves from creating and transferring benefits to the next phase of delivery. Staff highlighted that it was important the review took into account this evolving context and how the Charter could stay relevant and meaningful for the next five years. Relatedly, there was a concern that a focus on Social Security Scotland’s performance or operational issues could limit the ability of the review to fully explore the content of the Charter.

#### **6.4 Key principles of the review and research activity**

The findings from the scoping activity established four key principles for the review and research activity.

A priority was to deliver a review which met the legislative requirements to engage with the various stakeholder groups. Following the initial discussions with staff, researchers also considered it important to include Social Security Scotland staff in a more formal capacity, going beyond the legislative requirements. This meant that research activity was carried out with three groups: Social Security Scotland staff; clients with experience of the Scottish social security system; and partner organisations who work with Social Security Scotland and/or clients.

Given the key strength of the original co-design approach, it was important that research activity followed a similar methodology. This would ensure that clients were again at the heart of the process. Research with clients would use a similar workshop approach. This meant establishing a core group of client participants who would take part in the process over several months. Participants would receive advice and input from staff and relevant partners. This would help to ensure that the revised Charter reflected the operation of Social Security Scotland and realistic potential for future improvements. Whilst experiences of service delivery would of course be an important aspect, the focus of the co-design approach would be the Charter content in the context of the five year review period.

It was also important that research commit a proportionate amount of staff time to the review. Given the positive feedback identified from the scoping activity, the process would review the Charter and the framework but not carry out a wholesale rewrite. The original co-design process was thorough and the scoping activity indicated that the Charter for the most part remained reflective of clients' needs and hopes for Social Security Scotland. The review would reflect on the existing Charter and highlight areas for improvement and change, rather than attempt to start from scratch.

Lastly, although not part of the formal legislative requirements, the review should also consider the Charter Measurement Framework. This was important to maintain the close link between the two documents and ensure consistency. Following feedback from staff during the scoping activity, a review of the framework would also be used as an opportunity to ensure it better aligns with how Social Security Scotland works in practice and the data that is available to evidence the measures. The review of the framework would reflect the priorities identified through the co-design process for the Charter itself. Due to its more complex nature and reliance on analytical processes, the framework would require more detailed input and recommendations from staff. This approach would be discussed by the core client group and build on their recommendations for the Charter itself.

The research undertaken to write the original Charter also included the branding of the Charter document, the information covered in the introduction, as well as the naming of the Charter itself. The research undertaken as part of the review would not include these elements. The name of the Charter is now well established and in line with the intention to review but not re-write the document, the name of the Charter was considered outside the scope of this work. The introduction to the Charter would be updated by Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland officials to ensure it remained in-line with legal, policy and delivery requirements. Any changes to the branding of the Charter document would be considered by the Social Security Scotland communication team once revisions had been agreed.

The outputs of the research process would be: a revised Charter; a revised list of framework measures; and a report detailing the research process. The outputs would be considered by officials and ministers and a revised Charter would be laid to Parliament for approval in early 2024. A revised framework will be published once a revised Charter has been agreed by Parliament.

## **6.5 Research approach**

The research approach was broken down into three strands and three phases. The strands were: staff, partner organisations and clients. The phases were three-month blocks across 2023. Activity in each of the phases is outlined



below. More detailed information about the methods used in each strand of research are described in section seven.

#### 6.5.1 Phase one (April to June): Understanding and shaping priorities

In this phase, researchers conducted research with Social Security Scotland staff, partner organisations and clients as follows:

- Social Security Scotland staff were invited to take part in focus group discussions.
- Partner organisations were invited to take part in a survey or interview.
- Clients were invited to take part in a short survey with questions exploring their views of the Charter. Clients were also able to express interest in taking part in workshops during phase two.

#### 6.5.2 Phase two (July to September): Workshops with clients

In this phase, research focussed on working with clients to understand their priorities and needs from the Scottish social security system and developing revisions to the Charter. Activities during this phase were as follows:

- Researchers facilitated workshops with a core group of Social Security Scotland clients. These took place via video call, with four workshops held during this phase.
- Ongoing staff input on findings and advice about draft changes to the Charter and framework.
- Clients from groups that may not be represented in the membership of the core group were invited to take part in interviews or focus group discussions to help understand gaps in the experience of the core group.

#### 6.5.3 Phase three (September to December): Final analysis and write up

This phase focussed on consolidating changes to the Charter and framework. Researchers:

- Facilitated a final core group workshop to sense check findings and agree final recommendations.
- Concluded work to produce a list of proposed changes to the framework.
- Built on analysis developed throughout phases one and two focus and drafted this research report to describe the research process and findings.

The key principles and research approach were agreed by a working group made up of staff from the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland. Advice and guidance was also incorporated from a Research Advisory Group convened to support the research process. More information about the Research Advisory Group is given in section 7.3 below.

## **6.6 Approach to reviewing Charter Measurement Framework**

As outlined above, it was agreed that the review should also consider the Charter Measurement Framework. Given its strength in evidencing how the Charter commitments are being delivered, a priority for reviewing the framework was to ensure that it is closely aligned with any revisions made to the Charter. The original framework was designed after the Charter had been considered and agreed by Parliament. The research approach to the Charter Review meant that changes to the Charter would be developed over the course of 2023. These would then be considered by officials and ministers with any recommendations for changes being laid to Parliament in early 2024. To ensure alignment, changes to the framework would not be finalised until after revisions to the Charter have been agreed.

As outlined above, discussions with staff conducted as part of the scoping activity identified areas for potential improvement of the framework. Across 2023, researchers would continue to engage with staff, particularly analytical staff, to gain a fuller understanding of issues affecting the framework and to identify how measures could be updated.

Alongside staff input, feedback from clients and partner organisations would also be used to shape updates to the framework. Questions about the framework were included in the range of research with both groups. Findings from the review of the Charter would also feed in to the review of the framework. This would ensure the emerging changes to the Charter were mirrored in proposed revisions to the framework to ensure commitments continued to be robustly measured.

## 7. Research methods

This section provides information about the activities carried out in each of the strands of research.

### 7.1 Staff – focus groups

Research with Social Security Scotland staff was conducted through the People Panel. The People Panel is a cohort of almost 400 Social Security Scotland staff, selected to be close to representative in grade, job role and location of the overall agency workforce. Researchers work with the People Panel to find out more about colleagues' views and experiences on a range of issues.

In May, five online focus groups were held with a total of 26 staff. Sessions lasted 50 minutes and were led by a researcher with support from a notetaker. Participants were divided into five groups based on their job role and seniority. Two sessions were held with staff who interact with clients as part of their job.

Participants were asked about their familiarity with the Charter and its role in their work. Questions also covered positive aspects of the Charter and its impact on Social Security Scotland's culture, as well as any weaknesses or concerns. Participants also said whether the Charter was well-written, clear and accurate. Lastly, participants were asked if there were changes they would like to see or feedback they would like to provide for the core client group to consider during the workshops.

### 7.2 Staff – ongoing input

A group of around 35 officials in relevant areas across Social Security Scotland and the Social Security Directorate within Scottish Government were asked for regular input throughout the research process.

Feedback was sought on the research approach, emerging findings, and proposed changes to the content of the Charter and framework. This input was an important source of advice and guidance for the core client group who considered it as part of their discussions and development of proposed changes. Input from staff, particularly analytical colleagues, was central to drafting the proposed changes to the framework.

Feedback was collected via meetings, correspondence, input on shared documents, and through regular meetings of the working group.

### **7.3 Partner organisations**

Partner organisations were invited to take part in research via a survey, interview, or by attending an in-person event. Researchers worked with Social Security Scotland's National Engagement team to highlight the research using existing engagement and communication channels including a monthly stakeholder newsletter distributed to several thousand stakeholder organisations. This mirrored the approach taken to invite partner organisations to participate in the annual research carried out to report the Charter Measurement Framework. The research was also promoted to welfare rights organisations.

Between April and June, seven partner organisations took part in the research; five organisations responded to the survey and two took part in an interview. The low number of responses from partner organisations could indicate general satisfaction with the Charter. Respondents gave their views on how the Charter and framework were working, both what was working well and suggestions for changes.

Partner organisations were also involved in the review through the Research Advisory Group. As well as representation from SCoSS, researchers identified key partner organisations to approach to participate in the group. Organisations were selected to provide a perspective from the disability, carers and low-income communities, as the key client groups for Social Security Scotland. These were: Glasgow Disability Alliance, Carers Scotland, and the Child Poverty Action Group. The key purpose of the group was to provide comment, advice and support on the research including engagement with key groups such as partner organisations and clients from seldom heard groups.

### **7.4 Clients – survey**

As noted above, research with people who have experience of social security was central to the original design of the Charter and framework in 2018 and 2019. A key difference for the review was that research would this time focus on involvement of clients who have experience of the Scottish social security system. Research with clients was conducted using the Social Security Scotland Client Panels.

Established in 2020, the Client Panels are made up of Social Security Scotland clients from across Scotland who have agreed to take part in research. Research with Client Panel members explores what people's experience of Social Security Scotland has been like. The research informs decisions about the development and improvement of Social Security Scotland's systems, processes and policies.

In May, all Client Panels members were invited to take part in a survey to establish their priorities and needs for the Charter. The survey asked respondents about their familiarity with the Charter, what the purpose of the Charter should be, and what are the most important themes for it to cover.

In total, 864 unique survey responses were received. Where possible, information provided by respondents in the survey was matched to demographic information supplied previously by panel members. Around three quarters (76%) of respondents were women. Over half (57%) of respondents had a disability or long-term health condition. Around half (52%) had caring responsibilities. Around a third (36%) were aged between 35 and 44. Most (83%) respondents live in an urban area. There was representation from all local authority areas among the respondents. Further demographic information about the respondents can be found at Annex B.

## **7.5 Clients – workshops**

Alongside the invite to take part in the survey, a subsection of Client Panel members were also invited to take part in a series of workshops. Panel members were selected for this sample to ensure a broad representation of experience across the benefits delivered by Social Security Scotland. The sample was also chosen for certain demographic characteristics including age, gender, ethnicity and their locality.

Of the interested respondents, 29 panel members were selected to take part. Over the course of the workshops, 16 participants took part in at least one session, with 15 participants taking part in at least three. These participants are referred to as the 'core client group' in this report.

Where possible, information from workshop participants was matched to demographic information previously supplied by panel members. Detailed information is not given to preserve anonymity for those who took part. The following overview is included to provide some context.

More women than men were part of the core client group. The youngest participant was 23 and the oldest was 68. Members of the group included participants who: had a disability or long-term health condition; had caring responsibilities; were from an ethnic minority group. Most participants lived in an urban area. Most participants had experience of Adult Disability Payment or Child Disability Payment. Some had experience of carers benefits such as Carer's Allowance delivered by DWP, and Young Carer Grant delivered by Social Security Scotland. Some participants had experience of Scottish Child Payment.

Workshops took place online between July and October and each lasted for two hours. Workshops were made up of small group discussions as well as

inputs from researchers and guest speakers. The overall aim was to facilitate a detailed consideration of the content of the Charter and agree a set of proposed revisions. The core client group also discussed the framework. Given its complexity, discussions were less detailed on the measures themselves but did consider the approach to the review and how the framework could be communicated to clients. Annex C provides an overview of the workshop approach and content.

Researchers supported the group to have a positive experience. Participants were assisted to feel comfortable using the features of Microsoft Teams and agreed ways of working to guide their small group discussions. Participants received a £50 Love2shop voucher as a thank you for their participation in each workshop. Expenses were paid to cover any additional costs incurred for participating for example, to provide respite care or childcare.

## **7.6 Clients – seldom heard groups**

Seldom heard groups are groups of people that may be less likely to take part in research or be members of panels like the Client Panels. People in seldom heard groups may have particular experiences that mean they may face barriers when engaging with public services.

Research was carried out in two strands. Researchers carried out a review of existing evidence to identify known needs of seldom heard groups and prominent issues.<sup>15</sup> The second strand of research involved primary research with clients from seldom heard groups. This research was designed to assess what barriers participants face when engaging with organisations like Social Security Scotland. It also explored what these clients need the social security system to be like, and how these needs are, or could be, represented within the Charter.

Recruitment was conducted through two channels. Invitations were sent to around 600 Client Panel members to take part in an interview or focus group discussion. Using information previously provided by panel members, invitations were sent to clients with the following characteristics: digitally excluded, a first language that isn't English, Gypsy/Travellers, refugees, and veterans.

Researchers also worked with Social Security Scotland's National Engagement team to recruit participants via partner organisations. Partners were asked for help to promote an invitation to members of their communities who may be interested in taking part. This communication was sent to partner organisations and members of Social Security Scotland external reference groups. In addition, researchers attended a Gypsy Roma Traveller conference

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<sup>15</sup> More information about the evidence considered as part of the review can be found in section 11.

at Dynamic Earth to highlight the research and speak to community members about their experiences and thoughts on the priorities for the Charter.

Most participants expressed an interest in an interview rather than a focus group discussion. Between August and September, 18 interviews were completed, of which 15 were conducted by phone and three via video call. Participants were provided with a Love2shop voucher as a thank you for their participation. As with the workshops, expenses were paid to cover any additional costs incurred for participating for example, to provide respite care or childcare.

Where possible, information from interview participants was matched to demographic information previously supplied by panel members. Detailed information is not given to preserve anonymity for those who took part. The following overview is included to provide some context.

More women took part than men. Most participants were aged over 45. Some participants had a disability or long-term health condition and some had caring responsibilities. Participants were from a range of seldom heard groups, including: people with English as a second language, those from ethnic minority communities, refugees, people with recent experience of homelessness, people who experience digital exclusion, and people living in rural locations.

## 8. Phase one findings: Focus groups with Social Security Scotland staff

This section describes the findings from the focus groups with staff held in May. A summary of the findings and how they were used in the second phase of research is described in section 12.

### 8.1 Familiarity with Our Charter

There were varied levels of familiarity with the Charter among participants. In general, those most familiar with the Charter had worked for Social Security Scotland the longest and had roles with close connection to it. For example, these participants were involved in communicating with clients, setting up new processes and staff training. Most remembered taking part in training about the Charter when they first started at Social Security Scotland. However, there were several participants who said they had not heard of Our Charter until they were invited to take part in the research.

“For those of us who are client facing we need to keep it [the Charter] in our minds when talking to clients and colleagues...treating people with fairness and respect.” Staff focus group participant

### 8.2 Positive impact

Participants said Our Charter made it clear what can be expected from Social Security Scotland as an organisation. Participants said the Charter sets values and expectations for the organisation and gives focus to the values of dignity, fairness and respect. There was general agreement that the values in the Charter were “ingrained in the business”. Some said that although individual staff may not refer to the Charter “every day” it was “background noise” which informed the day to day work of Social Security Scotland. Some said the Charter provided a benchmark of standards across the agency that ensures the service provided to clients remains consistent. In this regard, participants said the Charter was a “golden ideal”.

“It’s maybe not spoken about explicitly all the time in that Our Charter says this Our Charter says that. But the ethos, the dignity, fairness and respect, is spoken about frequently and I think the Charter gives an elaboration on those three words.” Staff focus group participant

In general, participants said the Charter has a strong influence on organisational culture. They said it promotes responsibility, accountability, openness and honesty, friendliness and inclusivity. Participants thought the



Charter helped maintain a focus on values and how Social Security Scotland sets out to deliver services.

“[The Charter is] a mission statement, it’s our main aim as a company...gives us a framework for what we’re looking to achieve.” Staff focus group participant

“It should create expectations that stakeholder organisations hold us accountable for. I think it’s quite important that there are expectations of the Charter because it creates accountability as well.” Staff focus group participant

Most participants thought the Charter was positive for clients. Many said the Charter did a good job of setting out clients’ rights and what they could expect from Social Security Scotland. Participants said the Charter promoted flexibility to meet client preferences and needs, including a focus on inclusive communication. One participant said the Charter empowers clients and staff by emphasising that Social Security Scotland is open to feedback and wants to improve.

“[Social Security Scotland wants] clients to have confidence in us that we’re doing best we can for them. That’s what I like about the Charter.” Staff focus group participant

Participants thought the Charter set a high standard for staff behaviour. One group said the Charter had promoted change within colleagues’ mindsets regarding inclusivity. For example, in relation to issues of identity, sexuality, and gender. This was seen as important, as some participants said organisational culture could become diluted over time as the organisation grows. Participants also said the principles in the Charter provided staff with a foundation to raise feedback and stimulate change. For example, participants said the Charter was a solid grounding for committees and groups within Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government who advocate for staff for example, the Disabled Staff Network.

“It reminds people to be thoughtful and mindful of other people’s feelings.” Staff focus group participant

“Since joining agency just over year ago, we are really pushing out message of treating clients with kindness, and I feel the same in my area. Also good emphasis on seeing colleagues as individuals, taking into account their situation with kindness and flexibility.” Staff focus group participant

### 8.3 Delivering the Charter commitments

Some participants said the Charter was “aspirational” and commitments had not yet been fully implemented by Social Security Scotland.

“I think it’s aspirational, I wouldn’t necessarily say that we get it right with everything that’s in it yet. I think there are still some parts of it that are aspirational or what the organisation hopes to achieve, but they are still building towards fully achieving them.” Staff focus group participant

Participants highlighted a number of areas where they felt Social Security Scotland was not living up to the standards set out in the Charter. Many felt delivery of the Charter was let down by poor processes, a lack of training and support for staff, and by not utilising learning. Participants said there were gaps and inconsistencies in processes which meant some Charter commitments weren’t being delivered. There was a concern that the pace of design and initial delivery had led to later problems and delays. Participants said that this had limited the ability to meet aspirations.

“We’ve had to come up with minimal viable product which hasn’t necessarily delivered on our initial aspirations.” Staff focus group participant

“If we had put proper...processes and time compliance in from the beginning, linked to the Charter, do you think and agree fundamentally it would have been different in terms of efficiencies and delivering processes? Might have taken a bit longer. What’s more important, getting the money to people as quickly as possible, or taking longer, getting flack, and being more efficient in the long term?” Staff focus group participant

Participants gave of examples of problems with specific processes and systems. On delivering client rights, one participant said although the Charter mentions ‘referral’ for clients, this process had not been developed. Others mentioned barriers to meeting client preferences such as, a lack of face-to-face appointments, forms being difficult to read, and long waiting times on the phone. One participant highlighted a lack of communications co-ordination. Problems had arisen when clients are told information through social media that client advisers are not aware of and who then have to support clients who are unhappy. Several participants felt not enough was being done to seek feedback, address issues, and improve processes in the agency.

“I don’t have a referral process, I’ve only got a signposting process.” Staff focus group participant

“I think there are a couple of areas where we don’t do very well... I think we like to think we learn. But we capture lessons learned but we don’t always see changes on the back of that.” Staff focus group participant

Many participants felt that the Charter is only influential to workplace culture if it’s read and acted upon, which some felt was not the case. Client-facing staff particularly felt it was not being acted upon by staff in more senior positions. Participants also said staff sometimes did not have the support, skills and training required to do their jobs. For example, one participant said they had waited a long time to get equipment which limited their ability to complete actions with clients, leading to return appointments. Some said the Charter should take a more holistic approach that takes into account both staff and clients simultaneously for the better of both.

“One point in Our Charter is about making sure staff have training and skills to do their jobs. But that isn’t happening. Example is staff being moved into [benefit team] without training and months later still no training...and new staff not mixed in with more experienced advisers.” Staff focus group participant

“Agency does better with clients than staff...but without us you don’t have the happy client. We need to be happy too for the clients. For them to get best experience. We fall short with that part.” Staff focus group participant

“Issues with kit when we first went out to clients and took a long time to explain...I only just got new camera last week...So a long time involved in issues that knew would create more work down the line.” Staff focus group participant

Some participants thought Social Security Scotland did well to deliver the Charter commitments. Some highlighted that the agency has gone through a significant amount of change, and feedback had shown clients are generally happy with the service.

“We go above and beyond to help people in as little time as possible.” Staff focus group participant

“What others saying is absolutely correct...We don’t have systems that are helpful and 100% ready. But what we do see often is when we get to the conclusion of processes, suggests that the Charter and experiences are landing with clients, and experience of getting through to decisions is positive.” Staff focus group participant

## 8.4 Improvements

Most participants called for better communication of the Charter and what it means for clients and staff. Most groups said that Our Charter could be better utilised and better linked to day-to-day work. Several groups agreed on a need for ‘refresher’ courses or less formal but regular inclusion of Charter principles in ongoing learning and development events. Various groups said it would be helpful for the Charter to be embedded more often in conversations with line management and in team and organisation-wide meetings. Participants also said that it should be shared with all staff where the organisation is falling short on Charter commitments.

“You have to explain to people why they should be interested in the Charter or why whatever you are asking them to do relates back to our obligations and our commitments to the people of Scotland.” Staff focus group participant

“...if we aren’t achieving those organisational objectives should feed down to all of us to improve and aim to get those objectives.” Staff focus group participant

Participants felt there should be greater emphasis on how clients can help Social Security Scotland to deliver quicker processing of applications and more accurate outcomes. One participant said it was important that clients provided information when their circumstances change. The majority of comments were related to the role of supporting information in benefit applications, particularly for disability benefits. There was a sense that clients had an inaccurate perception about the role of supporting evidence. One group had an extended discussion about concerns that clients are not aware enough of their responsibilities in regards to providing evidence. The group said this led to problems such as longer processing times and inaccurate decisions.

“I don’t know if there’s a way to make clients more aware of their responsibilities, when it comes to claiming. Don’t know if it’s a Charter thing. Most common thing coming up is people not telling us anything: if they’ve moved, change of circumstances etc.” Staff focus group participant

“Definitely needs to be something that makes it clearer what we expect of client, about what we need to make it work faster and better. Straightforward for everybody. Clearer from beginning.” Staff focus group participant

Where clients had existing evidence such as a GP letter, participants said some clients had not included it in their initial applications because of previous advice to hold onto evidence and only submit it during redeterminations. It was felt this was based on experiences with the DWP and advice given by some

partner organisations. Participants said it was important to find an effective balance in information about supporting information which took into account both trust and the requirement for evidence.

“But I don’t think we’re putting it across that ... it’s a two way street. We should be more impressing upon them that they need to give us information so we can work in their interests.” Staff focus group participant

“I couldn’t count the amount of re-determinations where if the [evidence] provided had been given immediately it would have saved a re-determination and [been] processed quickly.” Staff focus group participant

One participant was wary of aspirational commitments which did not give clear information on the role of supporting information. The participants said it was better for clients if the Charter aligned with how Social Security Scotland works in practice.

“We constantly see problems where people decline to provide appropriate information because they’re told they don’t have to...And then from clinical perspective we usually find less than what is claimed, and then that leads to a re-determination...in the first place we should have taken on board feedback [about designing Our Charter] then really looked at practicalities, rather than just taking on board everything about how it would work in a perfect world.” Staff focus group participant

## 8.5 Format of the Charter

Overall, staff participants were very positive about the content and format of the Charter. Participants said it was clear and liked that it is available in different formats. One participant said some of the language should be updated to reflect that Social Security Scotland has been established for several years and was “no longer at the launch point”. Some participants said it should be updated to reflect how Social Security Scotland works. A few felt it was too long whilst others felt some of the Charter commitments were vague and could be more detailed. For example, there were some suggestions for improvements to make it clearer how commitments are delivered in practice.

“For the learning systems section, my question is Who? Who is going to listen, encourage us to provide feedback? Who is going to encourage staff to speak up? Who is going to value our feedback?” Staff focus group participant

There was overall agreement that inclusive communication was important. Some participants were concerned that if the Charter was more detailed this would make it longer and potentially less easy to read and understand. Participants also said it was important to take into account different

communication needs and use effective strategies to help clients engage with the Charter information. One participant said the Charter could better emphasise key messages by using more visual elements.

“There is an easy read form and a British Sign Language form, I like those things. I still think it’s a bit wordy. I think we could look at the inclusive communication aspects of the publication.” Staff focus group participant

“I think we could communicate them [headlines] more clearly. We could use more of the icons more generally across our materials.” Staff focus group participant

## **8.6 Feedback about the review**

One group noted the review was well-timed, given the introduction of new benefits and adjustments following the Covid-19 pandemic. Some said it was important to provide stakeholders involved in the research with information to help make sure ideas for changes were realistic. Others said it was important to consider how processing times could affect feedback from clients. Staff participants also said the research should aim to be representative and inclusive of seldom-heard client groups and reflect various communication needs.

“It’s important that the research is truly representative of seldom heard groups, or groups who experience communication disadvantage.” Staff focus group participant

In terms of what the review should cover, some thought it was important to explore whether the principles in the Charter continued to reflect priorities and needs. Some suggested asking about key issues that clients were unhappy with and where Social Security Scotland could improve. One group mentioned confusion among clients about eligibility and thought this would be good to explore with clients. Some participants said it would be worthwhile to ask clients about communication more broadly as they felt Social Security Scotland could improve in this area.

“Is this still the right charter, is this still the right way of doing things?” Staff focus group participant

“What are we underdelivering on?” Staff focus group participant



## 9. Phase one findings: Survey and interviews with partner organisations

This section sets out the findings from research with partner organisations. A summary of the findings and how they were used in the second phase of research is set out in section 12.

Five partner organisations responded to the survey and interviews were carried out with two. Given the small numbers, proportions are used in place of numbers to indicate findings below. Of those who took part, two partner organisations had supported the original co-design process of the Charter. Others were involved in supporting clients to be aware of their rights and campaigning for Social Security Scotland to live up to the commitments set out in the Charter.

### 9.1 How the Charter is working

In the survey, respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about how the Charter is working. Partner organisations who took part in interviews were also asked about their views about the format of the Charter and how it works in practice. There was generally favourable feedback about the way the Charter is written, that is clear and easy to understand, and is about the right length.

Overall, feedback was also positive about the influence of the Charter and its role in setting a standard to hold the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland to account. One respondent highlighted the co-design approach to develop the Charter. There was also positive feedback from one interview participant who said the Charter shaped the culture of Social Security Scotland and how clients are treated. One interview participant highlighted the importance of section four of the Charter, given its focus on the Scottish Government's ongoing approach to social security policy.

“We support the co-design model that led to the existing Charter and welcome its values and contents as a positive blueprint for social security in Scotland. We appreciate that the substance of the Charter is regularly referred to in the agency's policymaking and sectoral engagement.” Partner survey respondent

“[The Charter] makes it clear that dignity, fairness and respect are at the heart of what Social Security Scotland do. It works well in driving this type of culture.” Partner interview participant

There was some concern that client experiences with Social Security Scotland did not always “match up” with the commitments in the Charter. Partner organisations were concerned about different aspects of delivery, particularly application processing times. One interview participant also said that clients weren’t confident about challenging decisions or requesting re-determinations.

“The values and contents of the Charter do not always translate into practice. We are concerned at growing evidence of delays within the disability benefit system which suggests that the resourcing of the agency is not adequate to live up to the Charter's standards. We are particularly concerned about staffing levels and training which has resulted in some of our members reporting a service not dissimilar to the DWP.” Partner survey respondent

There was mixed feedback from partners about awareness of the Charter among clients. In responses to the survey, there was more negative than positive feedback about whether clients know how to challenge the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland if they do not live up to the Charter commitments. Interview participants said it was important that clients were made aware of the Charter but had different ideas about when it should be shared. One said sharing a copy of the Charter after an application is made would be helpful. Another said it made sense to send the Charter at the same time as decision letters.

“The fact that the Charter is issued to clients is extremely important in raising awareness.” Partner interview participant

## 9.2 Reporting on performance

There was mixed feedback to questions about the Charter Measurement Framework. Partner organisations thought awareness of the framework was limited among clients. Some thought the framework was too long whilst others thought it was the right length. There was also mixed feedback about how easy the framework is to understand. There was generally positive feedback that the framework brought together information from various sources into one place. Most agreed that the framework measured and reported on aspects of performance that matter to clients.

“I think it’s important that it [the framework] exists to ensure Charter commitments are being met. Allows us to see how Social Security Scotland are performing...[the fact it brings together information from different sources] is extremely important and helpful and means all relevant information is accessible in one place rather than having to source multiple publications.” Partner interview participant



“The framework is not well publicised and I think a lot more could be done to get the message across...a publicity campaign with easy to read information would be a good idea.” Partner survey respondent

Two partner organisations suggested more information should be shared about improvement activity. Whilst there was agreement that the Charter and framework were important ways to ensure accountability, these respondents said it was crucial to know how the monitoring of performance was used to improve service delivery.

“Any charter is only as good as its operational practices. Perhaps developing an improvement plan?” Partner survey respondent

“We are concerned that regardless of the accuracy of the information contained in each [framework] report, no narrative is offered as to the agency's or Scottish Government's response to it. While it is important to monitor the implementation of the Charter, this is not useful unless tangible steps are taken to address the deficiencies identified.” Partner survey respondent

## 10. Phase one findings: Client Panels survey

This section sets out the findings from the survey completed by over 850 Client Panel members. Respondents were asked to select answers to a series of questions and also had the opportunity to leave comments about the purpose and content of the Charter. Findings have been brought together under three themes: awareness, purpose, and format. A summary of the findings and how they were used in the second phase of research is described in section 12.

### 10.1 Awareness of the Charter

Survey respondents were asked if they had ever heard of the Charter (Table 8.1).

**Table 8.1: Had you ever heard of Our Charter? (n=858)**

	% of respondents
No	51%
Yes	33%
Unsure	16%

Just over half (51 per cent) said that hadn't heard of the Charter. A third (33 per cent) said they had and around a fifth (16 per cent) were unsure. Respondents who said they had heard of the Charter were asked how they had become aware of it (Table 8.2).

Almost half (49 per cent) of respondents who had heard of the Charter said they received a leaflet with their award decision letter. Over a third (37 per cent) saw information about the Charter online. One in ten (10 per cent) had seen information about the Charter on social media. Those who became aware in another way mentioned other communication with Social Security Scotland, knowledge from their workplace, or participation in research.

**Table 8.2: How did you become aware of Our Charter?\*** (n=283)

	% of respondents
I received a leaflet with my award decision letter	49%
I saw information about Our Charter online	37%
I saw information about Our Charter on social media	10%
I heard about Our Charter from a friend or family member	8%
I heard about Our Charter from a Social Security Scotland staff member	7%
I heard about Our Charter from a support organisation (for example a Welfare Rights Officer or from Citizens Advice Scotland)	3%
I saw Our Charter advertised in a building where I was meeting with a member of Social Security Scotland staff	1%
Another way	7%

\*Respondents could select multiple answers

Survey respondents who said they had heard of the Charter were asked how confident they felt that they would know how to raise an issue with Social Security Scotland or the Scottish Government if they felt their rights under the Charter were not being met (Table 8.3).

**Table 8.3: How confident do you feel that you would know how to raise an issue if you did not feel that your rights were being met?** (n=276)

	% of respondents
Very confident	42%
Confident	36%
Neutral	14%
Not very confident	6%
Not at all confident	2%

Over three quarters (78 per cent) felt very confident or confident they would know how to raise an issue if they felt their rights weren't being met. Less than one in ten (8 per cent) did not feel confident.

## 10.2 Communicating the Charter

Survey respondents were asked which options would be the most and least useful way to share information about the Charter (Table 8.4).

**Table 8.4: The most useful way to share information about the Charter with clients (n=821)**

	% of respondents
All clients are given a full version of Our Charter	35%
All clients are given a visual summary with images Our Charter	29%
All clients are given a written summary of Our Charter	23%
Our Charter is discussed with clients during phone calls, meetings or consultations, with copies available on request	13%

Just over half (52 per cent) thought the most useful way was to give all clients a summary of Our Charter, either a visual summary with images (29 per cent) or a written summary (23 per cent). Around a third (35 per cent) thought a full version of Our Charter was the most useful for clients. Slightly more than one in ten (13 per cent) thought the most useful way to share information was to discuss Our Charter with clients during phone calls, meetings or consultations.

Respondents said which way they thought was most appropriate to give clients a copy of the Charter (Table 8.5). Over half (56 per cent) of respondents felt that the most appropriate way to give clients a copy of Our Charter was with every decision letter. Around a quarter (24 per cent) felt it was most appropriate to provide the Charter only when requested. A fifth (20 per cent) said a copy of Our Charter should be given out with every correspondence from Social Security Scotland.

**Table 8.5: Which of the following do you feel would be the most appropriate way to give clients a copy of Our Charter? (n=850)**

	% of respondents
A copy of Our Charter is given out with every decision letter	56%
A copy of Our Charter is given out when requested but not included in letters to clients as standard	24%
A copy of Our Charter is given out with every correspondence from Social Security Scotland	20%

Survey respondents were asked where Social Security Scotland should tell people about Our Charter (Table 8.6).

**Table 8.6: Where should Social Security Scotland tell people about Our Charter?\* (n=840)**

	% of respondents
On the Social Security Scotland website	85%
On the mygov.scot website	74%
Through other organisations that support people (such as Citizens Advice Scotland, Money Advice Scotland, or Local Authority Welfare Rights advice services)	73%
At Social Security Scotland buildings	54%
Through social media	50%
Another way	6%

\*Respondents could select multiple answers

The majority (85 per cent) said information about the Charter should be on the Social Security Scotland website. Around three quarters said on the mygov.scot website (74 per cent) and through organisations that support people (73 per cent). Over half (54 per cent) said information about the Charter should be available at Social Security Scotland buildings. A few respondents mentioned other ways to tell people about the Charter such as: advertising via newspapers, radio and TV, at community locations such as libraries and supermarkets, and from Social Security Scotland over the phone and through the post.

Some participants left comments about how and when the Charter is shared with clients. Ideas included sending a copy to clients and having information on the agency’s website. Ideas about length included providing clients with a short summary version with a longer more detailed version available for those who wish to read it.

“Should be accessible to anyone who wants to information without having to request it or wait for a decision letter. Should be sent to everyone, or a website.” Client survey respondent

“People generally don’t like reading pages of legal jargon. So keep it factual, brief and share a link to the full Charter.” Client survey respondent

### 10.3 Purpose of the Charter

Survey respondents were asked their thoughts on what the Social Security Charter should do (Table 8.7).

**Table 8.7: What do you think the Social Security Charter should do?\***  
(n=858)

	% of respondents
Let clients know what they can expect from the Scottish social security system	90%
Build trust between clients and Social Security Scotland	72%
Set out how the service should be delivered	66%
Encourage clients to provide feedback on their experiences	65%
Set a culture in Social Security Scotland that puts clients at the centre	63%
Push Social Security Scotland / Scottish Government to live up to its values	60%
Let staff know how they should treat clients	56%
Hold Social Security Scotland to account	51%

\*Respondents could select multiple answers

Participants were given a list of eight purposes and asked to say which they thought the Charter should do. Each of the options received support from at

least half of respondents. There was strong support for the Charter to let clients know what they can expect from the Scottish social security system (90 per cent) and how the service should be delivered (66 per cent).

Purposes related to culture also received support from respondents. Almost three quarters (72 per cent) said the Charter should built trust between clients and Social Security Scotland. Around two thirds (63 per cent) said the Charter should set a culture in Social Security Scotland that puts clients at the centre.

More than half of respondents said the Charter should push Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government to live up to its values (60 per cent) and hold Social Security Scotland to account (51 per cent).

Respondents said how important different aspects of the Charter were to them (Table 8.8).

**Table 8.8: Important aspects of the Charter (n=838-857)**

	Very important/important	Not so important	No strong view
Our Charter accurately reflects how Social Security Scotland works	97%	1%	2%
Clients know how to challenge Social Security Scotland / Scottish Government if they do not think their rights described in Our Charter are being met	96%	0%	4%
Clients are aware of Our Charter	94%	1%	5%

Almost all respondents said it was important that the Charter reflects how Social Security Scotland works (97 per cent). Almost all also said it was important that clients are aware (94 per cent) of the Charter and know what to do if their rights aren't met (96 per cent).

Respondents ranked a list of seven themes in order of importance for the Charter to cover in the future (Table 8.9).

**Table 8.9: Which theme is the most important going forward? (n=807-850)**

Rank	
1	How you are treated and supported as a client
2	What staff are like, including their knowledge and expected behavior
3	How new parts of the system are designed
4	How we learn and improve our services
5	What the process looks like from application through to payment
6	What happens when you disagree with us
7	How we set an example and influence others (for example, challenging stigma)

Scores were assigned to each response to produce a ranking. Respondents said the most important theme for the Charter to cover was how clients are treated and supported. Second, respondents said it was important that the Charter sets out what staff are like. How new parts of the social security system are designed and how learning is used to improve services were ranked in the middle of the list. Ranked as the least important was how the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland influence others for example, by challenging stigma.

In comments left by respondents, some left feedback about their experience with Social Security Scotland. Some said they felt their experience did not align with the commitments set out in the Charter. Timescales and the importance of updates were recurring themes in the comments. A few respondents said they had experienced long waits to receive an outcome on their application or to speak to Social Security Scotland over the phone. Respondents said the Charter should give clients information on how long they should expect to wait for decisions. Respondents also said updates on the progress of their application were important, including updates if there were delays and when to get in touch with Social Security Scotland.

“It’s all very well sending out the Charter but it does not match what I’ve experienced with the new Adult Disability Payment. Staff need more training and time processing applications is far too long as well as getting through on the phone. Don’t feel valued, more humiliation and frustration.” Client survey respondent



“Providing clients with regular updates, starting with an email/letter/text that confirms receipt of application and it is also important to provide clients with a timeframe on how long it could take to process applications, in particular it is important to inform clients of any delays that might be incurred due to the number of applications that are currently being processed. Be open and transparent as possible.” Client survey respondent

“[Include a] timeline as this ‘we will get back to you’ reply is annoying. There should be a ‘if you no heard from us in so many weeks please phone us’.” Client survey respondent

Another theme among the comments was accountability, meaning how Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government are performing against the commitments in the Charter. Respondents said the Charter should include information about how the commitments are being met and some said it should also provide information for clients to provide feedback.

“...how it will be monitored, measured and reported against performance. How do you ensure its not another paper / tick box exercise.” Client survey respondent

“I don't think that the parts about what to do if you are dissatisfied are clear enough, there should be an easy to use route to discuss problems and have them resolved.” Client survey respondent

Another important theme was about culture and the role of the Charter in setting out that clients should be treated with dignity, fairness and respect.

“That everyone has value and everyone should be treated equally and with respect and dignity at all times.” Client survey respondent

“To view clients with compassion and empathy most especially the most vulnerable.” Client survey respondent

## 10.4 Format of the Charter

Survey respondents were asked what was most important in terms of the level of detail in the Charter and the length of the Charter document (Table 8.10).

**Table 8.10: Views on the length of the Charter (n=846)**

	% of respondents
The full version of Our Charter is thorough / detailed, even if that makes it longer, with a short summary available	38%
Finding something in the middle	32%
The full version of Our Charter is short / concise	30%

Responses were fairly evenly split. Slightly more than a third (38 per cent) of respondents said that it was important that the full version of the Our Charter was detailed, even if this meant a longer document. Around a third said that finding something in the middle (32 per cent) was important. Just slightly less said it was most important that the full version of Our Charter is short (30 per cent).

Survey respondents were asked what type of documents they would be likely to read if they wanted to know about Our Charter (Table 8.11).

**Table 8.11: In practice, what type of documents would you be likely to read if you wanted to know about Our Charter?\*** (n=829)

	% of respondents
A visual summary (a document which uses images as well as writing to give information)	57%
Up to 5 pages of writing	48%
One page of writing	41%
Documents in alternative formats (e.g. large print, Braille, alternative languages)	33%
5-10 pages of writing	13%
10-15 pages of writing	4%
15-20 pages of writing	4%

\*Respondents could choose multiple answers

Over half (57 per cent) said they would likely read a visual summary and just under half (48 per cent) said they would be likely to read a document of up to 5 pages of writing. Respondents were less likely to read longer documents;

around one in ten (13 per cent) said they would read 5-10 pages of writing and only 4% said they would read a document longer than 10 pages.

In their comments, respondents mentioned several important aspects of the format of the Charter. Respondents said it was important the Charter was written in plain English to ensure it was easy to read and understand. Some respondents said visual elements such as images and icons could help clients engage with the content of the Charter.

“Clear and concise. Clear and simple language used to ensure everyone understands content.” Client survey respondent

“The Charter should be easy to read, I find with visuals to look at people tend to retain the information more. Be honest and concise.” Client survey respondent

A few comments highlighted that the language used in the Charter should be specific and avoid vague, unclear statements.

“The language in the Charter should be as specific as possible, with zero room for multiple interpretations and vagueness.” Client survey respondent

“If it can't summarise the rights and responsibilities of both citizen and government and provide a simple, supported framework to challenge and uphold its aims, then it won't be very valuable...if it's bland and full of vague verbiage, maybe think again.” Client survey respondent

Comments also included suggestions for further explanation of terms used in the Charter and links to information about other forms of support for clients.

“A glossary.” Client survey respondent

“Links to the other sources of help and advice that are mentioned in the Charter should be clearer.” Client survey respondent

# 11. Phase one findings: Seldom heard groups evidence review

A review of existing evidence examined reports from the Seldom Heard Voices research programme.<sup>16</sup> The review of evidence highlighted a number of common barriers experienced by seldom heard groups to accessing and engaging with the social security system. The sections below outline these barriers. A summary of how these findings were used in the next phase of research are described in section 12.

## 11.1 Low awareness and isolation

A common barrier across all groups was a lack of awareness of the social security system and other sources of available support. This included being unaware or confused about eligibility rules and which body was responsible for delivering different benefits. People often stated that information about benefits was hard to find, difficult to understand or inconsistent.

“As a foster carer, I am not sure what I would be entitled to for the child within my care, then moving onto being an adoptive parent. I can now apply but due to never using benefits in the past, I do not know what or if I am entitled to anything.”<sup>17</sup>

Linked to the theme of awareness, isolation was a factor for many of the groups. This included social, physical and cultural isolation. These were sometimes mentioned as overlapping factors. For example, an older member of an ethnic minority community who is housebound may experience all three. Isolation could be compounded by a reliance on family and friends to support or handle applications and communication about benefits. This barrier was most commonly mentioned by those from ethnic minority communities or who had English as a second language.

## 11.2 Difficulty navigating the social security system

All of the seldom heard groups involved in previous research highlighted difficulties navigating the benefits system. The groups experienced barriers to understanding processes, completing applications, and making appeals.

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<sup>16</sup> To ensure that seldom heard groups have a voice in the design and development of social security in Scotland, the Seldom Heard Voices research programme was carried out between 2020-23. Publications of findings from this research can be found online: [Social Security Experience Panels: publications - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications-social-security-experience-panels/)

<sup>17</sup> Seldom Heard research programme: Carers and care experienced (2021) [Social Security Experience Panels - Seldom Heard research programme: carers and care experienced - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications-social-security-experience-panels-seldom-heard-research-programme-carers-and-care-experienced/), p. 19.

Participants described feeling confused and helpless during application and appeals processes. Participants said they weren't sure what they had to do and what was required of them. They said processes were unclear and weren't sure who was responsible for making decisions and how they were made.

The groups described the structure and language of forms as repetitive, inflexible, prescriptive and overly long. Many said that they relied on support from third party organisations to make applications and engage with the system.

"It was like a book. Someone with experience is much better to fill these things in. The woman from Macmillan took a pen and crossed out pages just saying, 'that's not relevant to you', but we didn't know..."<sup>18</sup>

### 11.3 Communication needs

All groups raised communication as a key issue and potential barrier. Needs varied between and within groups.

Limited means of communication was one of the most frequently mentioned barriers. This included people who felt they didn't have enough choice about how they communicated with benefit agencies. Some felt options were limited and some forms of communication were prioritised which might not suit everyone for example, online or telephone. Digital exclusion was another common barrier described across all groups. Feedback stressed that not all individuals felt comfortable using digital communication and many did not have access to the technology required, such as smartphones, computers or internet access.

"... [finding out about benefits] it depends on age, young people are all on computers and their phones and all their IT stuff, so certainly IT, but I still think like the older generation are more into like something to read and stuff, paper docs [...] different methods for different groups."<sup>19</sup>

Communication barriers also included language barriers when information was not available in an individual's first language. Participants said that not enough support was provided through translated materials or interpreters. People from ethnic minority communities or who had English as a second language also described cultural misunderstandings which could make it difficult to understand and navigate the social security system. Some said the

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<sup>18</sup> Seldom Heard research programme: End of life (2021) [Social Security Experience Panels - Seldom Heard research programme: end of life - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2021/06/Social_Security_Experience_Panels_-_Seldom_Heard_research_programme_end_of_life_-_gov.scot), p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> Seldom Heard research programme: Wave 2 (2023) [Social Security Experience Panels - Seldom Heard research programme: wave 2 report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2023/06/Social_Security_Experience_Panels_-_Seldom_Heard_research_programme_wave_2_report_-_gov.scot), p. 39.

language and concepts were not easily understood or translated where equivalent meanings were not available in their first language.

## 11.4 Stigma and discrimination

Participants across all groups reported negative experiences when interacting with staff about benefits. They described various situations where staff were unhelpful or unwelcoming, or gave poor quality information regarding benefits which was sometimes contradictory with other sources. Some had poor experiences with assessments in the DWP system which they described as stressful and degrading. Many thought the outcomes of assessments were commonly inaccurate.

Feedback highlighted insensitivity from staff who did not take into account the particular circumstances faced by these groups. For example, participants from mobile populations described feeling judged, stigmatised and discriminated against by staff.

Participants from various groups also described a sense of shame or embarrassment that they felt around claiming benefits. For some this included cultural issues which stopped people from applying for benefits they are eligible for.

“Treated me like a criminal, like I was a scrounger. They [DWP] don’t help people.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Seldom Heard research programme: Vulnerable groups (2021) [Social Security Experience Panels - Seldom Heard research programme: vulnerable groups - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2021/06/Social_Security_Experience_Panels_-_Seldom_Heard_research_programme_vulnerable_groups_-_gov.scot.pdf), p. 19.

## 12. Findings from phase one

This section summarises the key findings from the first phase of research with staff, partner organisations, and clients described in sections 8-11 above. These findings were used to inform the next phase of research. Findings were shared with the core client group at workshops and were used to help inform their discussions and to develop proposed changes to the Charter and framework. The findings were also used to refine questions used in interviews with clients from seldom heard groups.

### 12.1 Feedback about the Charter and implementation

Findings from research carried out in phase one confirmed key themes identified in the scoping activity. There was positive feedback about the Charter overall and the content appeared to reflect priorities. Staff thought the Charter gave focus to the values of dignity, fairness and respect and had a strong influence on organisational culture. Most staff also thought the Charter was positive for clients, and promoted a focus on supporting clients' needs. Overall, feedback was also positive from partner organisations about the impact of the Charter and its role in setting a standard to hold the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland to account.

There were some concerns about implementation of the Charter commitments. Some staff participants said the Charter was “aspirational” and had not yet been fully delivered. Staff said implementation had been let down by poor processes, a lack of staff training and support, and missed opportunities to build on lessons learned. There was also some concern from partner organisations that client experiences with Social Security Scotland did not always “match up” with the commitments in the Charter. Partner organisations were concerned about different aspects of delivery, particularly application processing times. Some client survey respondents left comments about negative experiences with Social Security Scotland which they felt did not reflect the Charter commitments.

### 12.2 Priorities

Findings from phase one identified key priorities for the Charter. Firstly, there was support for the Charter to set out how social security is delivered and what clients can expect from the system. Almost all client survey respondents (97 per cent) said it was important that the Charter reflects how Social Security Scotland works. There was strong support for the Charter to let clients know what they can expect from the Scottish social security system (90 per cent) and how the service should be delivered (66 per cent). Staff participants suggested that the Charter should include more information to

help clients understand how processes for supporting information work in practice.

Accountability was also identified as a priority. Client survey respondents said timescales and updates were vital for clients. Respondents also said the Charter should include information about how the commitments are being met. Some said it should also provide information for clients to provide feedback about their experience with Social Security Scotland. Partner organisations were more negative than positive about whether clients know how to challenge the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland if they do not live up to the Charter commitments. However, over three quarters (78 per cent) of client survey respondents felt very confident or confident they would know how to raise an issue if they felt their rights weren't being met. Partner organisations said more information should be shared about how the monitoring of performance was used to improve service delivery.

Findings show that culture was also a priority for the Charter. Almost three quarters (72 per cent) of client survey respondents said the Charter should built trust between clients and Social Security Scotland. Around two thirds (63 per cent) said the Charter should set a culture in Social Security Scotland that puts clients at the centre. Respondents said the most important theme for the Charter to cover was how clients are treated and supported. Second, respondents said it was important that the Charter sets out what staff are like. Barriers relating to stigma and discrimination were highlighted in the evidence review about seldom heard groups. The evidence described various experiences with the social security system where staff were unwelcoming or insensitive about their particular circumstances.

Lastly, communication and support for clients was identified as a key issue and common barrier among seldom heard groups. This included limited choice of communication methods, digital exclusion, and a lack of translation and interpretation.

### **12.3 Communication and format**

There were several key themes in the findings about the format of the Charter and the framework, and how they are communicated.

Firstly, there was mixed feedback about the awareness of the Charter and the framework. Among staff participants, familiarity varied although most remembered taking part in training about the Charter when they first started at Social Security Scotland. A third (33 per cent) of client survey respondents said they were familiar with the Charter. Around half (49 per cent) of these respondents said they heard about the Charter via a leaflet with their decision letter. The review of evidence from seldom heard groups found that low awareness of the social security system was a common barrier across all



groups. Partner organisations thought there was low awareness of the framework among clients.

Overall, feedback was positive about the way the Charter is written. Partners said it was clear and about the right length. Staff participants also thought it was clear and liked that it is available in different formats. Views were mixed among client survey respondents about the ideal length of the Charter. About a third thought that it was important that the Charter was detailed, even if this meant a longer document. Roughly equal proportions said the Charter should be short or it was important to find something in the middle. Staff participants raised a concern about including more detail in the Charter which would make it longer and potentially less accessible.

On the types of documents client survey respondents would read about the Charter, over half (57% per cent) said they would likely read a visual summary and just under half (48 per cent) said a document of up to 5 pages of writing. Only 4 per cent said they would read a document longer than 10 pages. Over half (56 per cent) of client survey respondents felt that the most appropriate way to give clients a copy of Our Charter was with every decision letter. The majority said information about the Charter should be available online.

Staff participants said it was important to consider different communication needs and to use effective strategies to help clients engage with the Charter. Client survey respondents said it was important the Charter was written in plain English to ensure it was easy to read and understand. Some respondents said visual elements such as images and icons could help clients engage with the content of the Charter. The use of visual communication was also raised by staff participants.

Some client respondents said that the language used in the Charter should be specific and avoid vague, unclear statements. Some also suggested that there should be further explanation of terms used in the Charter and links to information about other forms of support for clients. One staff participant said some of the language used in the Charter should be updated to reflect that maturity of Social Security Scotland.

There was mixed feedback from partner organisations about both the length of the framework and about how easy it is to understand. There was generally positive feedback that the framework brought together information from various sources into one place.

## 13. Workshop 1: Views about the Charter

The first workshop with the core client group took place in July and 14 participants took part. The aims of the workshop were to introduce the Charter, outline the review process and understand the group's priorities and identify areas for revision. Researchers provided information about the background and purpose of the Charter. Researchers also discussed findings from the first phase of research with clients, staff, and partner organisations. The group also received a presentation from SCoSS about their work to provide scrutiny of the Scottish social security system. Participants were split up into small groups to discuss their priorities for the Charter, the tone and language used in the Charter, and how the Charter should be communicated to clients. The sections below outline the findings from the small group discussions.

### 13.1 Feedback about the Charter and experiences with Social Security Scotland

There was positive feedback about the values and principles the Charter represents. Participants said having a charter and asking for input from clients reflected the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland's approach to social security and the values that shape the system. Overall, participants were also positive about the Charter itself. They said the Charter was clear, an appropriate length, and were positive about the content of the commitments. One participant said the Charter didn't seem like a "living document" given how much has changed in the years since it was written.

Participants also shared feedback about their experiences with Social Security Scotland. Some participants were pleased with their experience, highlighting in particular the culture of Social Security Scotland and of feeling "listened to". Some made favourable comparisons with previous experiences with the DWP. There was also positive feedback about decision letters, with participants calling them clear and concise, and about the web chat function.

"The support and level of availability have been excellent and it's actually been such a joy to deal with Scottish social security." Core client group participant

Other participants were less positive about their experience. Some mentioned long wait times to receive decisions about their applications or to talk to or connect with an adviser on the phone or via web chat. Other issues raised were: unclear or contradictory communication; lack of support to answer questions; and more training for staff to understand health conditions and their impact.

“[More training to give staff a] better understanding of the health condition the person has been diagnosed with.” Core client group participant

## 13.2 Priorities for the Charter

In their small groups, participants discussed their priorities for the social security system and the Charter. Participants mentioned a range of broad and more specific priorities. One group said it was important the commitments in the Charter are delivered. They said the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland should be accountable for the implementation of the Charter. Another group highlighted the influence of the Charter on the culture of Social Security Scotland and in particular, how staff treat clients. Participants said the messages within the Charter filter down to staff and can help clients have positive interactions. One participant said they had experienced poor interactions in the past and the Charter was a way to ensure clients had better experiences. One participant said the Charter set out how staff should be kind, and said it was important that clients reciprocated this by treating staff with kindness too.

“[The Charter could help to avoid an experience like] talking to someone on the phone not knowing [what to do] and the person on the other side not caring.” Core client group participant

Several participants said it was vital that clients were kept informed about the progress of their applications. Participants said updates can help prevent clients feeling anxious and disappointed when progress takes longer than expected. Participants mentioned “backlogs” of applications and uncertainty about when decisions would arrive. Participants said updates for example, via email or text message, would help reduce anxiety.

“People start positive then are disappointed...disappointment is crushing...If people know what’s going on, people won’t be disappointed.” Core client group participant

Participants also said it was important to have access to practical information about where to find help or who to contact if things go wrong. Suggestions included information for specific groups for example, carers, or about organisations who provide support. One participant said the Charter should include information about how to make a complaint. Others said it could be difficult to know which benefits to apply for when first engaging with the benefit system so a guide or a flow chart for different circumstances could be helpful.

### **13.3 The tone of the Charter**

Participants also discussed the language used in the Charter, and its overall tone. There were a range of views on whether the Charter should be aspirational or more realistic in tone. In these discussions, participants touched on a range of overlapping issues such as: setting a high standard for service delivery; giving clients reassurance about what the system is like and setting realistic expectations; and incorporating future ambitions for the social security system. One group felt it was important for the Charter to include aspirational elements. They suggested the Charter could include information about the future development of the social security system under headings such as “we will...” and “we aspire to...”. Another group felt it was “better [for the Charter] to deal in fact than aspiration”.

Overall, there was wide support for the Charter to avoid language which is ambiguous and open to interpretation. There was negative feedback for language which is “vague”, “woolly”, “ambiguous”, and “uncertain”. Participants preferred language which is clear, avoids confusion, and states with certainty “what can be done and what can’t”. As such, participants preferred commitments to use phrases like “we will” and not “we aim” to avoid potential uncertainty. One participant said they found communications from the Scottish Government to always be clear and precise and this mirrored their preference for “closed, clear written language”.

Participants said clarity helped clients have better experiences and can avoid the frustration of unmet expectations. One participant said clear commitments allowed clients to better understand the system and would be less likely to “expect miracles”. Another participant said this tone helped clients trust and believe the commitments would be delivered. One group said clear language also made it easier to judge if commitments were being met. Overall, there was a strong sense that the Charter should reflect what clients can expect from the social security system and similarly, that clients’ experiences should reflect the content of the Charter.

### **13.4 Communicating the Charter**

Participants were asked for their views on the format of the Charter and how it is communicated to clients. Some participants said awareness of the Charter was limited both among clients and across wider society. One group of participants said marketing the Charter would raise awareness of both the available benefits and the approach to social security as a human right. Participants said advertising benefits marked a significant difference from the approach taken by the DWP and reflected the ethos of Social Security Scotland, including the values of dignity, fairness and respect for clients.

There was mixed feedback about the best approach to sharing information about the Charter with clients. Whilst some participants mentioned paper copies of the Charter at community locations such as libraries, one participant highlighted the potential environmental impact and suggested digital communication instead.

Some participants said clients should receive a copy of the Charter as soon as possible in their interactions with Social Security Scotland. Others said a short summary of the Charter should be provided with all correspondence from the agency.

There was overall support for finding a balance between helpful information and keeping the Charter relevant and not too long. Participants thought clients were less likely to read a long document so a shorter document, a concise summary, would also be beneficial. There was a suggestion that a summary version could direct clients to a longer, more detailed Charter document to give clients choice about how much to read. There were also suggestions for including more visual elements to make the Charter more engaging.

### **13.5 Reflections on the Charter Measurement Framework**

Although not directly covered as part of their discussions, several themes raised by participants were relevant to the framework and were used to guide and shape the review activity. Participants were interested to know what was being done to develop and improve the social security system and about plans for the future. They highlighted that a key aspect of the power of the Charter would be lost without assurances about how the commitments were being met. However, in their discussions about accountability it was noted that there was limited awareness of the range of evidence about performance that is regularly published by the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland. These reflections were used to develop questions for the participants to discuss at a later workshop.

## 14. Workshop 2: A people's service and processes that work

The second workshop with the core client group took place in July and 14 participants took part. The aim of the workshop were to consider in detail the first two sections of the Charter: A people's service and Processes that work. Participants were asked about their overall impressions of each section and how the content aligned with their priorities, as discussed at the first workshop. Researchers guided participants through these sections line by line, highlighting potential areas for particular attention. These areas were identified based on the groups' priorities and findings from the first phase of research. The sections below outline the findings from these discussions. Charter commitments are presented in boxes to provide context.

### 14.1 Section one: A people's service

This section is made up of 13 commitments that will be delivered by the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland. The descriptor line for this section is: 'We are here to help you get everything you're entitled to'. This section also includes a list of five statements about things clients are responsible for under the sub-heading, 'Please help us by'.

There was positive feedback about the themes covered by the commitments in section one and general agreement that the content covered the right sort of topics.

"They [section one commitments] seem sound principles for a service. I would be happy if I thought that was how I was going to be treated and how the service worked." Core client group participant

"I think they are all pretty clear and concise...Everything is laid out really openly and honestly." Core client group participant

There were several areas where participants wanted to see further clarity about what the commitments mean in practice. Examples are given below where participants highlighted the need for further clarity.

Commitment 1.4 Support you through your application, keeping you updated and explaining what will happen and why

Commitment 1.6 Refer you to independent advice and support if you want extra help with your application or appeal. You are also entitled to ask someone that you know to support you

Commitment 1.10 Refer you to other organisations, services or forms of help where they could help improve your wellbeing or financial circumstances

Participants said they weren't sure what the difference was between being 'supported' and 'referred'. There was uncertainty about what "support looked like in practice". Some raised concerns about potential conflicts of interest and to what extent advice was independent. Some participants highlighted that commitments 1.6 and 1.10 did not chime with their own experience but could be helpful to clients. Related to commitment 1.4, participants returned to the priorities they had identified at the first workshop. They reiterated how important it was for clients to be kept up-to-date on the progress of their applications.

"There has to be some clarity around [commitments] 4 and 6." Core client group participant

"Some people don't want to use Social Security Scotland 'cause they won't advocate properly, there's a conflict of interest." Core client group participant

Commitment 1.5 Ensure staff are knowledgeable about social security to help you get what you're entitled to

Participants flagged experiences where staff had been unable to answer questions and where clients sometimes had more knowledge than staff. Participants said that although it was important for staff to be kind and treat clients well, it was just as important for staff to have the right knowledge to support clients. Participants said they would like to see more information about how staff are supported to have the right knowledge and skills.

Commitment 1.8 Be honest, provide clear reasons for decisions and explain what to do if you disagree

One participant said it was important to be careful when using terms like 'honesty', because the lack of updates and poor staff knowledge can lead some clients to question how far Social Security Scotland are open and transparent.

Commitment 1.11 Tell you if we think you might be entitled to benefits not delivered by Social Security Scotland

There was mixed feedback about commitment 11. One group of participants felt it was important to retain this commitment as it was helpful to clients to be given information about other forms of support. Others felt this might lead to clients claiming benefits they aren't entitled to. These participants said it would be better to update this commitment to say clients will be made aware of other support without being given potentially incorrect assurances about eligibility.

Commitment 1.12 Recruit people who care about delivering a service based on equality, respect, dignity and human rights

One group of participants highlighted commitment 12 as an example of where the intention was right, but the commitment didn't explain *how* it would happen.

"How do you ensure that you do that...how do you ensure that actually happens?" Core client group participant

In the 'Please help us by' section of A people's service, statements three and four relate to clients providing information to support their applications and keep their records up-to-date. Participants said these statements weren't clear enough on what information Social Security Scotland needed from clients. Participants wanted further clarity on the process of providing information and what this looks like and who it is from.

## 14.2 Section two: Processes that work

This section is made up of 12 commitments that will be delivered by the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland. The descriptor line for this section is: 'We will design services with the people who use them'.

Again, participants gave positive feedback about the themes covered by the commitments in this section. When asked if the commitments were being delivered, one participant noted they were "very positive" but also "a work in progress". One group were particularly positive about the first six commitments in section two.

"[Commitments 1-6] are all good and positive points." Core client group participant

As with section one, participants made a range of comments about where further clarity was needed. These are described below.



Commitment 2.2 Recognise your time is precious and handle your application and enquires as quickly as we can

Reflecting discussions in the first workshop, many participants again emphasised the importance of timescales and updates. There was some negative feedback about the word 'quickly'. As described in workshop one, participants disliked terms which were vague and open to interpretation. Some participants emphasised that it shouldn't be left up to clients to "chase" decisions as this could lead to stress which "takes over [a client's] whole life". Rather, participants said Social Security Scotland should proactively keep clients updated on the progress of their applications. There was also a suggestion for the Charter to include a timeline to help clients understand the various stages of the application process. Participants said it was also important to include information on what to do if timescales weren't met.

"The 'quickly' thing, could be rephrased. Time has a different meaning for everybody." Core client group participant

Commitment 2.10 Only carry out a face-to-face assessment for disability benefits when we are not able to make a decision with information that is already available

Commitment 2.11 Ensure face-to-face assessments are carried out in a way that puts your wellbeing first

Commitment 2.12 Make sure that face-to-face assessments are carried out by qualified staff who understand your condition and the impact it is having on you

These commitments relate to a process for gathering information about a client's health condition in relation to their application for a disability benefit. The Charter uses the language used in the DWP system, and refers to these as 'assessments'. Social Security Scotland uses different language and describes these appointments as 'consultations'. There was positive feedback about updating the language to reflect the term used by Social Security Scotland and about the term 'consultation' itself. Participants felt this term reflected more collaboration between staff and clients.

"[The term consultation] gives the feeling of a two-way thing rather than us looking at you. Consultation promotes the idea of both sides, so it's a good idea." Core client group participant

There was further feedback about changes to these commitments. Some participants suggested the commitments could be brought together or otherwise edited down. There was also a suggestion that some clients may

prefer consultations to discuss their health condition. Participants also wanted clarity on the decision making process particularly who makes decisions, and their knowledge, skills and qualifications. There was a substantial discussion about what the term 'qualified' means in reference to Social Security Scotland staff. Some participants said staff they had interacted with had lacked knowledge about health conditions. These participants emphasised that 'qualified staff' should mean staff "who understand your condition".

"If the staff have got the right skill base, the right knowledge, that's what people want to know." Core client group participant

### **14.3 Overall reflections on the first two sections of the Charter**

A key theme across comments about sections one and two was changes to improve the clarity of commitments and explain terms and phrases participants felt were unclear or unfamiliar. Participants were also keen to see changes to make sure commitments aligned with Social Security Scotland processes and how things work in practice. Participants also wanted to see information about key processes, such as decision making and consultations. There was further feedback about the need for information on how long processes take and updates for clients on the progress of their applications or queries.

## 15. Workshop 3: A Learning System and A Better Future

The third workshop was held in August and 13 participants took part. The workshop covered two aims; firstly, to consider in detail the third and fourth sections of the Charter: A learning system and A better future. As before, participants were asked about their overall impressions of each section, how the content aligned with their priorities, and were guided by researchers to consider potential areas for change. These areas were identified based on the groups' priorities and findings from the first phase of research.

The second aim was to review of the draft changes made to the first two sections of the Charter following discussions at the previous workshop. This allowed the research team to check they had understood the participants' points of view and interpreted their proposed changes correctly. Getting feedback also allowed participants to identify any further changes.

The sections below outline the findings from the small group discussions. Again, Charter commitments are presented in boxes for context.

### 15.1 Section three: A learning system and Section four: A better future

Section three is made up of 11 commitments that will be delivered by the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland. The descriptor line for this section is: 'We will encourage feedback and empower people to deliver the best service possible'.

Section four is made up of 15 commitments that will be delivered by the Scottish Government. The descriptor line for this section is: 'We will invest in the people of Scotland – making a positive difference to all our lives'.

These sections were covered together in the same discussion. These sections have less direct links to client experiences with Social Security Scotland or the application process. Overall, there were fewer comments from the group on these sections, although they did highlight areas for improvement which are described below.

Commitment 3.1: Listen, learn and improve by owning up to mistakes and valuing feedback, complaints and appeal decisions

Commitment 3.2: Encourage you to provide feedback, explain how you can complain and do everything we can to make things right

Commitment 3.3: Involve people using the service in measuring how well it works – including the commitments in Our Charter

Commitment 4.15: Develop ways of measuring how we are doing against the commitments in Our Charter

Participants built on their previous discussions about accountability and clarity around how commitments are delivered in practice. Several said they weren't sure how to provide feedback. One group said they weren't sure how to make a complaint. One group discussed the need for research with clients but weren't familiar with the ongoing research carried out by Social Security Scotland, including the Client Survey, which is sent to all clients. Participants agreed it was essential for the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland to measure how they are performing and make clients and others aware of the results. Researchers outlined the Charter Measurement Framework to participants and one suggested that a link in the Charter to the framework would be helpful. Participants said sharing information about performance "helped build that trust and transparency".

"How will this be done? How will it be improved? How will we measure it?"  
Core client group participant

Commitment 3.4: Make sure staff are well trained, supported and well equipped to do their jobs

Commitment 3.5: Ensure staff understand the needs of different people and the barriers they face – so that no-one experiences discrimination because of who they are

Participants gave positive feedback about the focus on staff training. One group said it was "reassuring" to see multiple commitments related to this. One group suggested these commitments should be "at the top of the list" to reflect their importance. Some participants noted that it was difficult for clients to know how well staff had been trained, or for this to be measured in a meaningful way. These commitments again raised comments about staff qualifications which had been discussed at the second workshop.

"Make it clear that staff will be trained and well-equipped, to get that reassurance." Core client group participant

Commitment 3.7: Build a workforce that reflects the diversity of the people of Scotland

Participants agreed that this commitment would fit better alongside other commitments about Social Security Scotland's workforce.

Commitment 3.11: Base services in places that are accessible and welcoming for everyone

There was general uncertainty among participants about what this commitment meant in practice. Participants said it was vague and the phrasing wasn't clear. There were suggestions to improve the clarity by focusing more on accessibility for clients rather than the accessibility of certain locations. Participants also said home visits are convenient for some clients and weren't sure how this commitment took that into account. One participant suggested the commitment should include an example of a 'service' such as "your local carers centre".

"The sentence itself doesn't make sense, the accessibility could be whether its accessible for everybody or whether its accessible opening times, and what are 'base services'?" Core client group participant

Commitment 4.5: Promote a positive view of social security, explaining it is a public service to be proud of – a human right there for all of us who need it

Commitment 4.6: Publicly challenge the myths and stereotypes about social security to help reduce stigma and negativity

Commitment 4.7: Change the language on social security – introducing more positive words to describe the service and the people who use it

Participants agreed they could see evidence of these commitments being delivered through the advertising of benefits for example, on TV. One participant said the Scottish Government was "putting this into action and it's not just words". This chimed with feedback from another group who said the Scottish Government's approach to social security was "amazing" and were praiseworthy about the section four commitments more broadly. There was some feedback that these commitments covered similar themes and there could be scope to merge or edit.

"I think it [section four] reads really well and I applaud the Scottish Government for their aims." Core client group participant

Commitment 4.8: Look for ways to make eligibility rules fairer and consider creating new benefits to meet people's changing needs

Commitment 4.9: Review the payment levels of Scottish benefits every year

One group discussed the relationship between the Scottish Government and UK government and how the power to make decisions affects how these commitments are delivered.

Commitment 4.14: Allocate resources fairly and efficiently, delivering value for money in a way that puts people first

Participants were uncomfortable with the wording of this commitment and were unsure about the intention behind it. Participants said it “doesn't sit right” and had “negative connotations”. Participants questioned the use of the terms ‘fair’ and ‘value for money’. They thought they were out of place and more likely to be used by private businesses or by firms making tenders for work. Participants asked “value for who?”

“Efficient, fair enough but ‘fairly’ is a really bad word to use in a document because everybody's opinion of fair is different.” Core client group participant

Commitment 4.13: Work with other public services to support delivery of the National Outcomes. These define the Scottish Government's vision for a fairer, more prosperous Scotland

There was some feedback about how this commitment related to earlier commitments about referring or telling clients about where to get help. Participants also said they weren't sure what National Outcomes are and it would be helpful to include a link to give people more information.

“Would everybody be aware of what the National Outcomes are? I think there needs to be something which highlights what they are as I'm not sure that I know that.” Core client group participant

## 15.2 Reviewing draft changes to sections one and two

Broadly, participants were positive about the draft changes prepared by researchers following the second workshop. In particular, participants were positive about the structural changes. The first two sections had been restructured, with new sub-headings introduced to group related commitments together. Overall, participants welcomed the new structure as helpful and gave support for continuing this restructuring approach to incorporate the final two sections of the Charter.

There was general support for the draft changes to the content, with participants commenting that the clarity of the commitments had been improved overall and in line with their priorities. However, there were several specific areas where participants felt more clarity was needed. These are described below – draft commitments as seen by participants at workshop three are presented in boxes to provide context.

Draft commitment: Have the right knowledge and training to help you, and help you find the answers if they don't know immediately

Draft commitment: Be recruited in a way that makes sure they care about delivering a service based on equality, respect, dignity and human rights

Draft commitment: Be trained to live up to these values. Social Security Scotland will also involve people with diverse lived experiences of social security and the organisations that represent them in this training

Participants said these commitments remained ambiguous. Several noted they would like to see more specifics about *how* these commitments would be delivered. There was also some confusion about staff training, with participants wondering if these commitments pointed to ongoing “refresher” instruction. There was a suggestion that recruitment should be more focussed on the type of person who delivers the service and *how* they are recruited. Lastly, participants also felt the responsibility to get answers should be more clearly assigned to Social Security Scotland. It was suggested that ‘help you find the answers’ should be changed to “help you get the answers”.

“Does [‘live up to’] imply there will be regular meetings with staff to look over values, and refreshed as it were?” Core client group participant

Draft commitment: Refer you to organisations independent from Social Security Scotland, including the Social Security Independent Advocacy Service, who can offer you support if you want extra help with your application or appeal. You are also entitled to ask someone that you know to support you. We will need your permission to talk to that person or service about your application.

Draft commitment: Signpost/direct you to other organisations, services or forms of help where they could provide advice to help improve your wellbeing or financial circumstances

Draft commitment: Tell you if we think you might be entitled to benefits not delivered by Social Security Scotland and how you can get information about whether you might be eligible



Participants discussed these commitments in detail. Overall, participants said more clarity was needed to understand what they meant for clients in practice. There was a question about the independence of the advocacy service and if the mention of Social Security Scotland should be removed. There was also uncertainty about whether 'extra help' was potentially off-putting and would discourage clients from seeking support unless they needed "lots of help". Participants also said it would be preferable to highlight if other services or organisations were free to use or if client would need to pay to use them.

Lastly on these commitments, there was a range of opinions about the terms 'refer', 'signpost', 'direct' and 'tell'. Participants thought it was important the commitments were accurate and that the language reflected the processes they described. For example, if there was a difference between what 'refer' and 'signpost' meant for clients, this should be clear. There was also some caution among participants about Social Security Scotland staff 'telling' clients other support was available without being certain whether the client was eligible.

"You've got be careful with 'referring' as that means they're actively communicating with the other organisation". Core client group participant

"'Signpost' has very negative connotations and it feels like they're just trying to fob us off". Core client group participant

"I like the word 'signpost', you can have a friendly signpost and a fobbing off signpost". Core client group participant

"There's a danger that you might falsely think you're going to get more help than you will actually get". Core client group participant

Draft commitment: We will work towards implementing a system to provide updates on the progress of your application and expected timelines, including being transparent when things might take a bit longer

There was mixed feedback about this draft commitment. Participants had various suggestions on changes they would like to see. They questioned what 'work towards' meant in practice. One suggested "we will implement" would be better. Some thought the commitment put the emphasis on the client to pursue updates but would prefer Social Security Scotland issued these automatically. There was also a preference for replacing 'being transparent' with more plain English such as "inform". One participant said they thought it would be better to say "as quick as we can" when it came to progressing applications.



“I think it’s an endeavour, nothing is guaranteed and things can take longer. It’s an aim to process as quickly as possible”. Core client group participant

“We have to be more specific, more of a doing than just thinking about it”. Core client group participant

Draft commitment: Where consultations are needed, they are carried out by a Social Security Scotland health and social care practitioner with relevant experience

Draft statement: Giving us the information we need to help you. This includes working with us to gather any supporting information needed to come to the right decision

Participants were unfamiliar with who ‘health and social care practitioners’ are. Again, participants discussed staff qualifications and training and said it was unclear what was meant by ‘relevant experience’. Some thought the draft changes were an improvement but there was still a general feeling the information about supporting information could be clearer.

Draft commitment: Continue to pay you at the same level if you challenge a decision to reduce or stop your award by providing Short Term Assistance payments during this process, which does not have to be paid back

Participants were unfamiliar with ‘Short Term Assistance’ and said more information should be provided to explain the payments.

Draft commitment: Decisions are reached by a dedicated team who will review the information provided in your application, all supporting information, and consult with Social Security Scotland’s experienced health and social care practitioner team as needed. We will only request a consultation for disability benefits if we are not able to make a decision with information that is already available.

There was further feedback about more clarity on the decision-making process including who makes decisions and their qualifications and training. One participant said the phrase ‘decision making team’ should be more specific. There was a suggestion to add the word ‘qualified’ to reassure clients that staff are trained to make decisions. There was also a suggestion to include a visual element for example, a flowchart, to set out the steps of the decision-making process.

Original commitment: If you have questions along the way, we will handle your enquiries as quickly as we can

Some participants were unhappy with the phrase ‘as quickly as we can’. They felt it was “meaningless” and should “go without saying”. There was mixed feedback about how this commitment should be reworded. Some felt if a definitive timescale couldn’t be stated, the commitment should be removed.

### **15.3 Reflections on clarity and further information**

Researchers were pleased with the overall positive feedback about the draft changes to the first two sections of the Charter. Participants confirmed that the changes reflected their previous discussions and continued their engaged detailed approach to reviewing the commitments. Overall, the need for further clarity and additional information was evident. Participants continued to emphasise accountability and what commitments mean for clients in practice. Particular areas of interest were: measuring performance; staff knowledge and training; the need for updates; and how clients are given information about other forms of support.

Participants highlighted several areas where further information could be helpful for clients. For example, they suggested phrases such as ‘National Outcomes’ and ‘Short Term Assistance’ could be explained and information about the Charter Measurement Framework, referrals, and the consultation process could be outlined. Based on this feedback, researchers developed a ‘Useful information for clients’ annex. This grouped proposals under three headings: a glossary; process outlines; and helpful links. The intention was to bring together suggestions for additional information that participants would like to see to feed back to officials, including communication colleagues, for input on how this could be provided for clients.

The findings from workshop three were used to create a full draft of proposed changes to the Charter and a list of ‘useful information’. These were circulated to participants and formed the basis for discussions at workshop four.

## 16. Workshop 4: Agreeing changes to the Charter and reviewing the framework

Workshop four was took place at the end of August and 14 participants took part. The aims of the workshop were to review the proposed changes made so far and agree a full set of changes. Researchers explored whether participants were content that changes reflected their comments from workshop three. Researchers also highlighted outstanding issues. Participants also considered the new 'Useful information' section. Lastly, participants also shared their views on the Charter Measurement Framework including the approach to the review and priorities for communicating the framework.

Participants also received a presentation from the Scottish Human Rights Commission. The presentation gave an overview of the role of the Charter in delivering a Human Rights based approach to social security in Scotland.

### 16.1 Draft changes to the Charter

There was continued support for proposed changes to structure of the Charter. There was some movement of commitments between sections and sub-headings had been added to each section to bring together commitments into related themes. Updates had been made to the wording of commitments based on discussions at workshop three. Researchers took participants through these changes in small group discussions. This was the second time participants had reviewed changes to the first two sections and the first time looking at changes to sections three and four. Participants made some suggestions for further changes which are described below. Draft commitments are again provided in boxes for context.

Draft commitment: Recruiting people who care about delivering a service based on equality, respect, dignity and human rights, and including this in our recruitment criteria and questions

Following further changes based on feedback at workshop three, participants were now happier with the wording of this commitment. However, there was a suggestion that the commitment was "wordy" and could be rearranged to put 'recruitment criteria' at the beginning of the sentence.

Draft commitment: Delivering face-to-face services in local communities in places that are convenient, welcoming and accessible for you. This includes home visits if appropriate

Participants thought the second draft of this commitment was better and reflected their feedback from workshop three. There was an assumption that face-to-face could mean home visits and a suggestion that the commitment could reference other forms of communication such as video calls. There was positive support for the idea to add 'face-to-face services' to the glossary to provide more information about the choice available to clients.

Draft commitment: Refer you to a free and independent advocacy service (the Social Security Independent Advocacy Service), to support you if you are disabled, to help you understand and be involved in decisions which affect you

Participants questioned why the advocacy service was only available to clients who are disabled. There was continued uncertainty about the independence of the advocacy service from Social Security Scotland.

Draft commitment: Signpost you towards other organisations that may be able to provide advice or guidance

Participants again discussed the terminology used to tell clients about other services and how this was done in practice. Participants repeated their view that 'signpost' was unclear. Some participants said the word 'signpost' should be changed to 'direct' as this was "easier to understand".

Draft commitment: Implementing a system to provide updates on the progress of your application and expected timelines, including if things might take a bit longer

Participants said the revisions to the wording of this commitment were a "welcome change" and made the information in the commitment more "helpful" to clients. Participants liked the idea of being told when it will take more time to process their applications. One participant disagreed and said it remained unclear: "you either have timelines or you don't, you either have internal targets or not".

Draft commitment: Ensuring that if you have questions along the way, we will handle your enquiries as quickly as we can

The wording of this commitment continued to generate significant discussion. Some participants remained unhappy with the phrase 'as quickly as we can', while others were content. Ideas for replacement words were limited but there was a suggestion this could be replaced by "forthwith". One participant highlighted that the wording would depend on "what clients wanted and what could be delivered". Participants again reiterated the value of updates and prompt answers to avoid clients "feeling forgotten".

Section 3: A learning system tag line: We will encourage feedback and empower people to deliver the best service possible

There was negative feedback about the word 'empower'. Some thought it was meaningless and others were unsure about *who* was empowered – clients or staff.

Draft commitment: Measuring each year how we are delivering the commitments in Our Charter and building lessons learnt from this into future improvements to our services

Participants were happy with the changes to this commitment to provide more specific information about measuring performance and using it to improve.

Draft commitment: Put people first as we deliver an efficient service and deliver value for money

Participants were still hesitant about this commitment following changes made by researchers based on feedback at workshop three. Many were still unsure about the phrase 'value for money'. They reiterated that the phrase had "negative connotations" and had "prejudice" which implied "cheap". There was a suggestion to add a group of people at the end of the sentence to make it clearer *who* the value was for. For example, "for every person" or "for everyone that is using the service".

## 16.2 'Additional information for clients'

There was overall support for the addition of 'useful or additional information' relevant to the Charter. Information included: a glossary, an overview of key processes, and helpful links. An overview of this information can be found in section 5.5.

Participants thought clients would find additional information "very helpful" but agreed that it had to be "meaningful". One group stressed that the 'useful information' should not replace or dilute the commitments of the Charter. There was general agreement that including information in a separate section would stop the Charter becoming too long or cluttered.

Some participants thought the 'useful information' should be placed at the top of the Charter, others said at the end. Some thought this could make the Charter itself too long and suggested two versions – a short summary Charter with links to the full information in a longer version. One participant was concerned about the impact of printing paper copies of detailed information and questioned whether this was value for money.

“I like the idea of having it [information about a term] at the end, in the glossary, looks more streamlined, easier to read”. Core client group participant

### 16.3 Reviewing the Charter Measurement Framework

Participants heard an overview of the approach to reviewing the framework. There was overall support for proposed approach, particularly that the framework should reflect changes to Charter and how Social Security Scotland works in practice.

Connected to previous discussions about accountability and transparency, participants said it was important for the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland to share information about performance. Participants were unfamiliar with existing mechanisms for measuring performance such as published research, statistics and Social Security Scotland’s annual report. Feedback emphasised that data on performance “needs to be out there” and participants said in particular, people who use the service want to “know how it is delivering for them”.

The group suggested information was shared with clients to show “what we’ve done”. Ideas for how to do this included an “in the news” section of Social Security Scotland’s website which one participant described as “user friendly”. Other ideas were to share links to published information, distribute flyers with “headlines” and promote information in community locations. Two participants raised concerns about printed information and value for money.

“...with the Scottish Government everything is online and I think it is superb...I think there should be a contact that if you want paper copy then we can send one to you.” Core client group participant

In terms of content, participants said information should cover what improvements have been made and what is coming next; “where we are and where we’re trying to get to”. There were suggestions the content could be divided into sections which show what the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland “have done / will do / aspire to do”. Other suggestions were to focus on key changes and give rolling updates.

“We have achieved this or we’re still not achieving this, but are putting things in place to improve.” Core client group participant

Participants said reporting on performance should focus on what clients are most interested in. There were limited suggestions for what this information should cover. One suggestion was for data on redeterminations and appeals and timescales for decisions. This was echoed by another participant who said clients were primarily concerned with “how long things take”. Participants

also said that reporting should make clear how clients are involved in improving the service, including reviewing the Charter.

“We are involving people who use the service”. Core client group participant

“Showing [the revised Charter has] come from the wider populace make it a bit more meaningful that it was more inclusive”. Core client group participant

Participants were clear that information about performance should be simple and concise. One group looked at the 2021-22 framework and said it was unlikely clients “would read 105 pages”. Some thought two versions, a summary and a longer more detailed version, could be helpful for clients. Participants said this could allow information to be tailored to “users of the system” and “other interested groups”.

“People want something that is easy to go through and quick.” Core client group participant

Participants were also agreed that communication about performance should avoid jargon and be easy to follow. Participants said that visual communication could be more engaging than lots of text. There were suggestions for graphs and charts to show things like year-on-year comparisons. For example, one participant suggested “good visible information” to show things like how long applications took today compared to six months ago.

## 17. Phase two findings: Seldom heard groups interviews

This section sets out the findings from interviews carried out with clients from seldom heard groups in August and September. Participants were asked for feedback about the Charter and what they need the social security system to be like. Participants were also asked broad questions about barriers to accessing and engaging with the social security system and how the Charter could address these.

### 17.1 Experiences with Social Security Scotland

Many participants were happy with their experience of Social Security Scotland. One participant said translation services had always been available to support his discussions. Some mentioned long processing times and waits to speak to an adviser on the phone. One participant said it would be helpful to receive confirmations and updates about their application.

“In general I’m very happy. I’ve never had any major issues. There’s always been a Polish translator available...Perhaps waiting times could be reduced as this can be quite stressful.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

“I expect a response. I didn’t get confirmation I made the application. I chased it four or five weeks later but impossible to get through. There was a message on webchat to say don’t chase, it was disheartening... At least an automated response email with a digital receipt so you know things have been received.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

Two participants said they had received help to complete forms and found this very helpful. One participant said it was important for the Charter to reflect that clients can get help with forms.

“I was finding it quite hard to do the application so I called up and they said they could send somebody out to my home. The person came out and helped and I sent the application out and everything was fine.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

“It’s not always about money – even being able to get forms filled out for you [is important].” Client participant from seldom heard groups



## 17.2 Feedback about the Charter

Overall, feedback was positive about the language and tone of the Charter. Most participants said that the wording, content and structure was clear and easy to understand. One participant gave negative feedback on the Charter language, which they felt was too simplistic.

“I think the language is very plain, very simple. I know how complex government documents can be.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

“...almost patronising in the choice of language. Plain English agenda but I find it patronising, a few bigger words that explain it and sound less government speak.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

Some participants said having a charter demonstrated a respect for clients within the social security system. They felt it showed that clients' needs and wellbeing were given important consideration.

“Having the Charter suggests respect, it looks like people who get this support are important because it's not like there is indifference as to how [clients] feel.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

“The fact that it exists is a huge positive.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

Participants were positive about the values set out in the Charter. Participants said the Charter set standards and expectations about how social security is delivered. For example, there was positive feedback about the inclusion of commitments around tackling discrimination and stigma. Another example was commitments on recruitment and training which participants said showed how Social Security Scotland aimed to deliver these commitments in practice.

“The Charter is very good because it allows everybody to know where they stand from the beginning. The Charter mentioned what the staff stands for and the client will know what the organisation is trying to deliver.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

“I really liked publicly challenging the myths and stereotypes about social security to help reduce stigma and negativity.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

Although there was positive feedback about the values of the Charter, some participants were keen that it should align with how services are delivered in practice. Some participants said the Charter should focus on providing clients with a realistic picture of what they can expect.

“Should be more practical than emotional.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

“If you could do the aspirational bit at the very beginning and the rest very pragmatic and honest. Most people will go okay that’s fair enough. We will try to do this within budget.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

### **17.3 Accountability**

Participants said that Charter commitments to measure and review performance on a regular basis showed good faith from the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland to resolve problems that may arise. One participant shared an example from their own experience with Social Security Scotland. The participant had experienced long wait times to speak to an adviser on the phone but was pleased to hear Social Security Scotland were taking actions to address this.

“They’ve shown a real kind of willingness to try and learn, and try and be supportive. One of the things that you know I had personally flagged up was the length of time, you know, phone calls can take to, you know, to be answered and things like that. And I know from different meetings and things that I have attended, that’s been a real priority to address that. So that’s been really positive.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

Participants said it was important for the Charter to focus on accountability, to be open about performance and willing to learn and improve. One participant said it would increase their confidence in Social Security Scotland’s service if they shared information about when things have gone wrong and what was done to resolve it.

“Being prepared to listen and learn from mistakes and grow from that [is important].” Client participant from seldom heard groups

“Actions rather than words, so seeing that it is actually happening...That you do what you say you are going to do...That’s how trust is built...Sharing real stories, a way of making people believe that you are being honest about it, about your service, sharing the good and the bad [...] It would be helpful to see that [negative experiences] happened, and how Social Security Scotland dealt with it.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

### **17.4 Links with other support**

Some participants suggested better communication for clients about available support. One example was a one page summary document outlining available benefits for different groups. Some participants said there should be better

signposting between organisations. This included a suggestion for the Charter to include information about organisations that Social Security Scotland work with who may be able to provide other forms of support. Participants generally responded positively to suggestions made by the core client group for the Charter to include links to additional information. One participant noted that there should also be better signposting to Social Security Scotland from other organisations or services.

“...if you put it in the government agencies that you will be working with whether national or local...Then people could say have a look at the Charter to look for support.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

“It’s a good idea to give you links to help you to look and maybe you need to find something you need.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

“Nothing in [the Charter] that infers guidance or support can be offered elsewhere...I applied for Universal Credit and the Scottish Child Payment wasn’t mentioned or Social Security Scotland wasn’t mentioned...Helpful if organisations who people in need go to, say ‘you could maybe apply for this or that’.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

## 17.5 Communication needs

Participants highlighted several barriers related to communication. Overall, feedback reflected the need for inclusive communication and awareness of a range of communication needs.

“[Make it] as easy for everybody to navigate as possible...a lot of things these days as more and more things are sort of driven online, you can be met with just, you know, walls and walls of text... it’s all about accessibility.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

Barriers included difficulties faced by clients who have a first language that isn’t English. Participants said communication in English made it difficult to understand what they have to do. Participants said it was important that written information can be translated and interpreters are available.

“When there’s too much information and then if it’s not your first language or some people are not patient when reading and if the information is too much they can get lost.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

“Sometimes you need someone to know exactly what is going on and it may not be easy to explain as my first language is Arabic. I know they offer other languages by post but by phone it would be better to have an interpreter available.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

Types of communication were also important to participants. One participant described being directed toward a method of applying for benefits that they could not use because they did not have the correct ID or functionality on their phone. This participant suggested giving applicants advance notice of the materials and tools that they will need to apply. One participant said their visual impairment could make it difficult to engage with information online. The participant was very pleased that Social Security Scotland offered home visits for clients as this suited their needs.

“I had to do something with my smartphone but it didn’t have the function that was needed, so I couldn’t use that option, so it was another problem. If this process demands specific functions on the smartphone, it would be better to have this highlighted at the beginning.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

“I am visually impaired and it is a case for a lot of different services that if you go online very often it is hard to see what it is literally on the screen...getting technology does help but very often you need help to get the technology so you can get online...The fact you have people coming here to my home, that was brilliant, absolutely fantastic.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

## 17.6 Communicating the Charter

In general, and in line with previous findings relating to seldom heard groups, participants described a lack of awareness regarding what services they were eligible for. For example, where someone was digitally excluded and was unable to access online materials, or where a participant who is a refugee was encountering the Scottish social security system for the first time.

“We didn’t know if there was any organisation we could approach for help with the benefits system and for that reason there was a lot of time wasted, because we did not apply in time we had to borrow money from people to spend on what we needed...there should be something in place so that as soon as somebody arrives in Scotland to provide this information.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

Participants gave a number of suggestions about different ways of communicating the Charter with clients. One suggestion was to make it available as audio narrated by a human, rather than computer, on the Social Security Scotland website or via a dedicated phonenumber. Participants said it was important the Charter was available in different languages. There was also a suggestion to include visual elements such as diagrams or charts in addition to written text. Others said a summary version would encourage people to read it.

“Your customer can have English as another language. Lack of charts or diagrams, I like to see them.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

“Slightly longer than some that I have seen, so maybe an idea to have a kind of, almost like, an abridged version... with the most important points.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

Some participants also gave suggestions about where the Charter should be promoted. One participant suggested engaging with community and cultural groups to raise awareness. Some said the Charter should be distributed as paper or leaflet copies in-person at meetings or outreach events. Although, one participant had a concern about the potential costs of printing the Charter.

“We also have in Edinburgh and Glasgow a Ukrainian community, you could have a poster there or have some staff there to share some information and advertise there.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

“A flyer or booklet would help people to understand. Maybe every year or six months, like a newsletter. Aims and purpose and what they are going to do in the future.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

“...if on paper then that’s quite an expensive, thousands of copies, a lot of money in a time of austerity. As a member of public I take umbrage as that could be put in the public purse for something useful.” Client participant from seldom heard groups

## **17.7 Changes to the Charter**

The feedback from clients from seldom heard groups covered many of the same themes raised in other strands of the research. For example, positive feedback about the values in the Charter and how they shape the delivery of social security. Accountability against commitments was also again raised as an important theme. Providing clients with additional ‘useful information’ was supported by participants, who welcomed the idea as helpful and offered suggestions about what should be included.

Changes to a small number of commitments were made to reflect what clients from seldom heard groups had said about their priorities and some of the key barriers they face. For example, further clarification was added about the ways Social Security Scotland can support clients to make applications. There was also some rewording of commitments in section four about the awareness and take-up of benefits. Changes were made to highlight that information would be shared with a range of communities at convenient locations. Lastly, some changes were made to commitments related to communication to make sure they covered different client needs and preferences.

## 18. Workshop 5: Consolidation of findings

The final phase of the research took place between September and December. The focus in this phase was producing a final draft of changes to the Charter, revising the framework, and writing a report describing the research process.

Before workshop five, changes to the draft revised Charter were made based on feedback from the core client group at workshop four. Some changes had also been made based on the findings from the interviews with clients from seldom heard groups, as described in section 17 above. Comments from the Research Advisory Group were also taken into consideration, including adding a commitment to set out how the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland work with SCoSS. This reflected the role of SCoSS in providing scrutiny of the social security system and aligned with clients' strong interest in accountability and performance.

Also taken into account was feedback from the group of staff who had given ongoing input to address questions raised by participants and give advice on processes and terminology. Staff from Social Security Scotland's communications team also provided input about language and tone. Edits were made to align the terms used in the Charter with Social Security Scotland's style and to make sure commitments and headings were clear and as easy to read as possible.

The final workshop with the core group took place at the start of October and 14 participants took part. The main purpose of this workshop was to reach agreement on a final draft of revisions to the Charter. The group received a presentation from Social Security Scotland about the role of the Charter in delivering their service. The sections below describe the discussions at the final workshop.

### 18.1 Structure and content of the Charter

In their smaller groups, participants discussed the changes that had been made since the previous workshop. The participants also discussed their thoughts overall, including on the final structure and whether the revised Charter reflected their priorities.

Overall, there was support for the changes that had been made since workshop four. There was broad agreement that the draft now represented the group's final recommended revisions. Participants were content that changes reflected their priorities and feedback to date.



“It’ll be a much improved document.” Core client group participant

“A better version of what it was.” Core client group participant

There was positive feedback about some changes as well as some suggestions for further revisions. These are described below with draft commitments presented in boxes for context.

In section one, participants liked the change in language from ‘staff’ to ‘colleagues’. They thought ‘colleagues’ was a positive word which suggests “inclusivity”.

Draft commitment 1.6: Help you understand what you’re entitled to and support you if you make an application

Participants thought this commitment could be made clearer to let clients know what practical support is available.

Draft commitment 1.12: Providing information in different formats and languages and communicating with you in ways that meet your needs as much as we can. For example, by providing interpreters

There was general agreement with the changes to this commitment. One participant said it “could not be bettered” and another said it made sense to include given the diversity of people in Scotland.

Draft commitment 1.15: If you want someone, or an organisation, to support you with your application or contact with us, with your permission we’ll make this as straightforward as possible

One participant highlighted this commitment as an example of “helpful rewording” since workshop four. Another said this commitment now provided “reassurance” about the support available to clients.

Draft commitment 1.14: Refer you to a free and independent advocacy service. If you have a disability, this service can help you understand and be involved in decisions which affect you. You can also ask someone that you know to support you

Participants reiterated that it was unclear why advocacy was for clients who have a disability and not all clients who need support. One participant suggested that “vulnerability” replace the mention of ‘disability’.

Draft please help us by statement: Telling us how we can make it easier for you to use our service. For example, if you have communication or cultural needs – we'll do our best to meet them

One group of participants highlighted the phrase 'we'll do our best' as an example of the vague language which they wanted the Charter to avoid. Participants did recognise however, that there would be limitations to how Social Security Scotland were able to meet clients' needs for example, in delivering in-person services in remote areas.

Participants also gave feedback about sections two and three. One group were not keen on a change of language in section two to 'along the way'. They felt this was too simplistic.

Draft commitment: Only carrying out a consultation for disability benefits when we're not able to decide based on the information that is already available or if you request one

There was positive feedback about "helpful rewording" to this commitment to include the option for clients to request a consultation if they wish to have one.

Draft commitment: Working with the Scottish Commission on Social Security who provide independent scrutiny of the Scottish social security system

Participants were content with the added commitment about SCoSS and thought it was "good to add in".

Draft commitment: Continue to pay you at the same level if you challenge a decision to reduce or stop certain benefits. This is called "Short-term Assistance" and you do not need to pay this back

Participants said it was important for clients to have further information about Short Term Assistance and suggested it could be included in the 'Useful information' section.

Draft commitment: Providing information to help answer any questions you may have along the way and responding to enquiries as quickly as we can

Some participants continued to say the phrasing 'as quickly as we can' was vague and suggested this commitment could be refocussed on providing clients with updates.

There was, again, positive feedback about section four commitments. On reflection, one group considered if section four should be moved to the



beginning of the Charter as it “sets into place the whole feeling of it and how it will be delivered”.

Draft commitment: Putting people first as we deliver an efficient service and deliver value for money for the people of Scotland

Following detailed discussions at previous workshops, participants liked the addition of ‘for the people of Scotland’ to this commitment. Participants thought it was now clearer, and reflected that social security was for “not just those sick or need it, but everyone”.

Draft commitment: Promoting a positive view of social security as a human right and a public service to be proud of

Draft commitment: Publicly challenging myths about social security and stereotypes about the people who use it, focussing on using more positive words to describe both

Participants thought the changes to these commitments were positive and again highlighted that they provided a clear signal that social security was “here to help you not judge you”.

Draft commitment: Making sure as many people as possible get what they are entitled to by delivering on the principles set out in the Benefit Take-up Strategy

Draft commitment: Reaching people who are most likely to be excluded including by providing information about social security in community locations

Participants agreed with the revisions to these commitments and supported the aim to improve awareness and take-up. Participants said more information on the Take-up Strategy should be provided in the ‘Useful information’ section.

## **18.2 Additional information for clients**

Overall, there continued to be support for additional ‘useful information’ relevant to the Charter but this was more modest than in previous discussions. Overall, there appeared to be support for a glossary of terms and helpful links. Participants were less sure about visual ‘maps’ or flowcharts. It may have been harder for participants to engage with these ideas without examples of what they look like and what information they could contain. One participant said that the new content in section two of the Charter meant it was less necessary to include visual explanations of the application process. One participant said that some of the suggested information would be common

across the Scottish Government, so it could be helpful to link to the gov.scot website.

Participants raised concerns about how this information was communicated to clients and the potential impact on the Charter document. A key concern was about length. Participants said it was important to make sure the Charter wasn't too long or complicated. Although some participants suggested the 'useful information' came at the end of the Charter, some were concerned this would make the document overly long. One participant stressed that the "Charter is about rights" and "it's not a document that should explain everything". Another participant also said "you don't want to overload people". There were a couple of suggestions for additional information to be provided in a standalone document to accompany the Charter to avoid making the Charter itself longer.

Participants were generally supportive of providing links to online information. Several discussed hyperlinks as a way to highlight specific terms or phrases and link to further information. Participants said hyperlinks would keep the content of the Charter concise while still offering the option for more information for clients who wish to read more. One participant suggested a QR code that directed to information online. Participants were unsure about how this information could be provided to clients who can't access information online. They raised questions about how the additional information could be included in paper copies of the Charter. Participants recognised it was challenging to adopt just one method of providing the information given the range of different communication needs among clients. There was also a concern that additional information should be current and up-to-date. Participants weren't sure how this could be maintained if information was printed on paper copies.

### **18.3 Final reflections on the Charter Measurement Framework**

Some smaller groups had time to discuss final reflections on the Charter Measurement Framework. Participants said it was important that information about performance was accurate and up-to-date. Participants again said it should focus on "broad brush performance" with data about key timescales for clients. For example, phone wait times and time taken to process applications. Lastly, participants said it should be transparent about known issues and include "feedback from people to show what's been done to fix things".

### **18.4 Feedback from the core client group**

At the end of the final session, the research team thanked the core client group for their diligent participation in the workshops. Participants who had

attended at least one workshop were invited to take part in a short survey, anonymously if they wished, to provide feedback about their experiences of the research. Eight participants provided feedback.

Participants were asked to say how much they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about the workshops. All participants who completed the survey agreed or strongly agreed the sign-up process to take part in the workshops was clear and straightforward. All also agreed the information provided during the presentations was easy to understand.

All were happy with the structure for the workshops, including timings on workshop days and breaks. All agreed the facilitators had made them feel at ease and they had been treated with dignity, fairness and respect. All agreed the rules for the small group discussions had been clearly explained, agreed upon and followed in their groups. One participant said they neither agreed nor disagreed they had the opportunity to raise issues or concerns regarding the Charter that were important to them.

Thinking about the workshops as part of the overall Charter review process, all agreed they understood how their input would be used. All also agreed that taking part in the workshops allowed them to make a meaningful contribution to the Charter Review process. Based on their experience of taking part in the workshops, all said they were very likely to take part in future Client Panels research.

Participants also left comments to say what was good about their experience of taking part in the workshops. Participants said they had felt listened to and appreciated the opportunity to be involved and have their input taken into consideration.

“A feeling of being listened to and that my opinion was important and valued.”  
Core client group participant

“It felt like my views were being taken seriously and would be used in the Charter review process itself.” Core client group participant

“Being able to be part of something that will make a difference.” Core client group participant

There was also positive feedback about the researchers and staff involved in the workshops. Two participants said all members of the group had been supported to get involved and share their views.

“The researchers were all very cordial and friendly and the other people taking part had some great points. It seemed to me like people were being listened to and understood.” Core client group participant

“[Staff] were very welcoming and engaging therefore taking part was an enjoyable experience. Attendees given every opportunity to contribute in an inclusive way.” Core client group participant

# 19. Revising the Charter Measurement Framework

This section outlines the approach to reviewing the measures that make up the framework.<sup>21</sup> The work resulted in a set of revised measures which will be considered by Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government following the parliamentary procedure to conclude the Charter review process. As such, a list of proposed changes has not been included in this report.

## 19.1 Identifying areas for improvement

Within Social Security Scotland, the Charter Measurement and Client Panels team lead on producing the annual framework publication. This team work closely with other analysts and policy officials to gather evidence for the framework each year. This team provided an overview of each measure in the framework and their reflections on issues which have affected reporting. This input provided a starting point for a detailed consideration of each measure, its relationship to the Charter commitments, and the data required to provide evidence to report on it. Discussions with analytical and policy staff identified a number of areas for potential improvement.

Some measures are very similar in meaning, or come at the same concern from multiple different perspectives. This adds to the number of questions required to ask clients, particularly in the Client Survey. This can feel repetitive for clients responding to the survey and requires analytical staff to spend additional time analysing and making sense of the data. This duplication also adds to the length to the published framework, potentially making it a less accessible document. For context, the 2022-23 Client Survey received over 30,000 responses and the 2022-23 framework is 130 pages long and includes over 60 tables of numerical data as well as a significant volume of qualitative data.<sup>22</sup> An example of measures which cover similar themes are presented in the box below.

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<sup>21</sup> Social Security Charter: Measurement framework (2019): [Social Security Charter: measurement framework - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-charter-measurement-framework-2019/pages/1-100.aspx)

<sup>22</sup> Social Security Scotland Client Survey 2022-23 (2023): [Social Security Scotland - Client Survey 2022-2023](https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-scotland-client-survey-2022-2023/pages/1-100.aspx) and Measuring Our Charter 2022-23: How Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government are delivering on Our Charter commitments (2023): [Social Security Scotland - Measuring Our Charter 2022/2023](https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-scotland-measuring-our-charter-2022-2023/pages/1-100.aspx)

Measure 1: X percentage of clients said they were treated with kindness

Measure 2: X percentage of clients said they felt trusted by staff

Measure 3: X percentage of clients said staff listened to them

Measure 4: X percentage of clients said they felt staff did all they could to make them feel comfortable

Table 18.1 shows an example of where clients are asked multiple questions on the same theme in the Client Survey (rows) but analysis shows close consistency in responses. For example, clients are asked two questions about whether they agree or disagree Social Security Scotland are open and honest. Responses show 89% of respondents answer both questions with the same response.

**Table 18.1: Examples of 2021-22 Client Survey questions exploring the same theme**

<b>Thinking about your experience with Social Security Scotland since [date], how much do you agree or disagree with the following...</b>			
<b>Question 1</b>	<b>Question 2</b>	<b>Question 3</b>	<b>% same response</b>
Social Security Scotland treated me with dignity	Social Security Scotland treated me fairly	Social Security Scotland treated me with respect	91%
Social Security Scotland is an open organisation	Social Security Scotland is an honest organisation		89%

Analytical staff also raised concerns about some measures which do not easily match up with existing management information, or do not align with operational practice. An example of this is a measure looking at the percentage of Social Security Scotland's Local Delivery venues which meet a checklist of accessibility requirements, as shown below.

Measure 52: X percentage of social security offices pass the accessibility checklist (Checklist to be agreed by disabled people with lived experience)

This information is unavailable for many venues and also does not reflect that venues for client meetings are selected based on the needs of the client. For example, for a client who doesn't drive, a venue that is on a bus route may be more accessible for them than one that has accessible parking. A more meaningful measure may be whether a client's accessibility needs were met when meeting with staff.

Another example raised by analytical staff was measures about payments and processing times for benefit applications, below.

Measure 31a: X percentage of clients paid on time from the first time

Measure 31b: X percentage of applications processed within X days

Measure 32: X percentage of clients paid correct amount from the first time

There is duplication here between measures 31a and 32. Measure 31b has been historically reported against a timescale of 10 days, which only aligns with the processing timeframe for one Social Security Scotland benefit, Funeral Support Payment. Analysts in Social Security Scotland have worked together to establish a better reporting practice for application processing times for inclusion in the frameworks to date.

Another concern about the existing framework was the multiple layers of analysis needed to report data for some measures. For example, the measure asking for examples where clients faced discrimination below.

Measure 6: X percentage of clients said staff did NOT discriminate against them

Measure 7: X percentage of clients who experienced discrimination said they felt able to challenge it

Measure 8: X percentage of clients who felt discriminated against that did challenge that discrimination

Measure 9: Examples of good practice AND examples of discrimination (if any) AND Social Security Scotland action taken

These measures require four levels of analysis as follows:

- first level: 'did the client face discrimination'
- second level: where yes, 'did Social Security Scotland take steps to remedy this'
- third level: where yes, 'was the client satisfied'
- fourth level: 'provide examples'

This type of measure poses challenges in that it requires multiple questions to be asked of clients on a single theme. It also reduces the number of respondents to such small numbers that it can be difficult to either meaningfully report on, or report in a non-disclosive way.

It is essential that individual clients cannot be identified in analytical data. Some measures would be best answered through matching client responses with client case information. For example, to explore information about complaints or re-determinations. This would however, breach the ethical protocols in place to ensure participation in research is anonymous and which separate analytical staff and staff who make decisions. Clients who take part in research are reassured that their participation is voluntary, anonymous, and staff involved in processing applications or making payments will not know they have taken part.

In addition to publishing the Charter Measurement Framework on an annual basis, the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland also publish a range of other information about social security in Scotland.<sup>23</sup> Although there is a legislative requirement for most of these publications, it is worthwhile for the review to consider how far existing published data is repeated in the annual framework.

Lastly, there were some concerns about how the measures in section four of the framework are reported. These measures evidence the client-centred, collaborative, and joined-up approach which underpins how the Scottish Government design and deliver the social security system in Scotland. These measures are less straightforward to measure and rely more on narrative explanations compared to the data used for other measures. Some staff felt this led to section four feeling more “woolly” than the rest of the framework. There was also a question about the balance in the framework between operational and policy focused measures. Measures about delivery span three separate sections, compared to just one on the policy aspirations for the social security system.

## 19.2 Criteria for change

The findings from discussions with staff were used to develop a set of criteria for reviewing and updating the framework. These criteria were discussed by the client core group at workshop four with broad support for the approach. These are outlined below:

- Bring the framework in-line with proposed changes to the Charter. This includes changes to the structure and wording of commitments.
- Measures should be consolidated to avoid duplication and reduce burden on clients and partner organisations who take part in research.

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<sup>23</sup> Examples include: Updates on the Social Security Programme Business Case, for example see: [Social Security business case: February 2023 - executive summary - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#) and Social Security Scotland’s Annual Reports and Accounts, for example see: [Social Security Scotland - Annual Report and Account 2022-2023](#)



- Measures should be in-line with Social Security Scotland working practices. This will reduce unnecessary staff time spent on data gathering data for measures which could be evidenced in a more meaningful way.
- Measures should be updated (or removed) where data is not captured or where there is not enough data to report meaningful findings.

### **19.3 Proposed revisions**

As outlined above, a list of proposed revisions has not been included with this report. The following information provides some context about the nature of the proposed changes to date. Final revisions will reflect changes made to the Charter as agreed by the Scottish Parliament in 2024.

Firstly, it is suggested that measures are re-ordered to reflect the structure in the proposed revised Charter. Also, the wording of measures should be updated to reflect the terminology used in the revised Charter. Proposed updates also include splitting out measures which previously covered multiple concepts. This makes it easier to evidence measures and easier to understand reporting.

Potential updates to the measures in the first three sections of the framework included revisions to measures which call for qualitative data to give examples. By stating that examples will be presented where available, the proposed changes take into account that not all experiences may be represented among those who take part in research. For example, clients who have experienced an appeal or making a complaint. Further, where participants have experience of certain processes, it might be impossible to use these examples without compromising the anonymity of participants.

Proposed revisions also update measures to align with previous reporting. This covers measures where interpretation has been used to provide meaningful reporting in previous frameworks. These measures relate to call waiting times, application processing times and staff knowledge about how clients can challenge decisions.

Input from officials who work on social security policy within the Scottish Government was used to produce recommended changes to the measures in section four of the framework. Researchers who work on the evaluation of the social security system considered the overall ambition of the section. It was considered if it is appropriate for the measures within this section to be more subjective or if changes were needed to make it more tangible. It was agreed that it is more appropriate for evidence to be more narrative in section four than in other measures. Officials also considered what changes may be needed to 'future-proof' the measures in this section for the next five years. Proposed revisions are mainly small changes to the wording of original measures.

## 20. What's next

The findings in this report have been shared with officials in the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland. Officials reviewed the proposed revised Charter and have made a small number of further amendments to produce a final set of proposed revisions.

Communications officials from Social Security Scotland will update the Charter's introductory text and refresh the design of the Charter document. Communications officials are also developing options for how to publish the additional information recommended by clients.

The proposed revised Charter will be considered by the Scottish Parliament in early 2024. Following approval by Parliament, the revised Charter will be implemented. Revisions to the Charter Measurement Framework will be finalised once the revised Charter has been agreed.

This report will be shared with Client Panel members who took part in the research. The findings will also be shared in the regular Client Panels newsletter.

# Annex A: External analysis of Our Charter

## – sources

**Audit Scotland**, [‘Social security: progress on implementing the devolved benefits’ \(2022\)](#)

**Citizens Advice Scotland**, [‘The draft Scottish social security Charter: written evidence from Citizens Advice Scotland’ \(2019\)](#)

**Equality and Human Rights Commission**, [‘A review of social covenants’ \(2022\)](#)

**Joseph Rowntree Foundation**, [‘How social security can deliver for disabled people in Scotland’ \(2021\)](#)

**Scottish Association for Mental Health**, [‘Scottish social security’ \(2021\)](#)

**Social Policy Association**, [‘What we can learn from Scotland’s approach to social security’ \(2018\)](#)

## Annex B: Demographic information about survey respondents

**Table B1: Gender (n=813)**

	Percentage (%) of respondents
Woman	76%
Man	23%
Prefer not to say	*
In another way	*
Non-binary	*

\*figures have been suppressed due to small numbers

**Table B2: Age (n=772)**

	Percentage (%) of respondents*
16-24	2%
25-34	12%
35-44	36%
45-54	20%
55-64	24%
65+	7%

\*Figures may not add to 100 per cent due to rounding.

**Table B3: Benefit experience (n=833)**

	Percentage (%) of respondents*
Scottish Child Payment	45%
Adult Disability Payment	38%
Carer's Allowance Supplement	38%
Child Disability Payment	27%
Best Start Grant	23%
Best Start Foods	18%
Winter Heating Payment	16%
Child Winter Heating Assistance	8%
Funeral Support Payment	5%
Job Start Payment	2%
Young Carer Grant	2%
None*	3%

\*In answering this question, respondents may have thought about unsuccessful applications, if payments had not yet been received, or payments from a long time ago.

**Table B4: Location (n=702)**

	Percentage (%) of respondents
Urban	83%
Rural	17%

**Table B5: Ethnicity (n=812)**

	Percentage (%) of respondents
White	90%
Minority Ethnic	9%
Prefer Not To Say	1%

**Table B6: Disability and long-term health condition status (n=815)**

	Percentage (%) of respondents*
Has a disability or long-term health condition	57%
None	41%
Prefer Not To Say	3%

\*Figures may not add to 100 per cent due to rounding.

**Table B7: Caring status (n=644)**

	Percentage (%) of respondents
Is a carer	52%
Not a carer	44%
Prefer not to say	4%

## Annex C: Overview of client workshops

Workshop aim	Inputs	Discussion outline	Desired outputs
1) Understanding the Charter and setting priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to the Charter</li> <li>• External views on the Charter</li> <li>• Overall findings from phase one research</li> <li>• Presentation from SCoSS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity to ask questions about the review</li> <li>• Priorities for the Charter</li> <li>• Areas for change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List of priorities for the Charter</li> <li>• Identify areas for change</li> </ul>
2) Priorities for change in sections 1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview of priorities</li> <li>• Findings from phase one research about areas for change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and agree priorities</li> <li>• Detailed review of sections 1-2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List of proposed changes for sections 1-2</li> </ul>
3) Priorities for change in sections 3-4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview of how feedback was used to develop draft changes</li> <li>• Findings from phase one research about areas for change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review proposed changes to sections 1-2 and agree any further revisions</li> <li>• Detailed review of sections 3-4</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List of agreed changes to sections 1-2</li> <li>• List of proposed changes for sections 3-4</li> </ul>
4) Agreeing changes and reviewing the framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview of how feedback was used to refine and develop draft changes</li> <li>• Introduction to the Charter Measurement Framework</li> <li>• Overview of proposed approach to reviewing the framework</li> <li>• Presentation from the Scottish Human Rights Commission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review proposed changes in full and agree any further revisions</li> <li>• Review the proposed approach to reviewing the framework and consider priorities for change</li> <li>• Communicating performance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreed drafting of proposed changes</li> <li>• Agreement on approach to reviewing the framework</li> <li>• Ideas about how performance should be communicated to clients</li> </ul>

Workshop aim	Inputs	Discussion outline	Desired outputs
5) Consolidating change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview of how input from workshops 1-4 was used to develop the final draft of the revised Charter</li> <li>• Overview of findings from research with clients from seldom heard groups</li> <li>• Presentation from Social Security Scotland</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and agree the final draft of proposed changes</li> <li>• Changes to the content and format of the framework, including how it is shared with clients</li> <li>• Experiences of taking part in the workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreed final changes to Charter</li> <li>• Feedback on taking part in research and the Charter Review process</li> </ul>



### **How to access background or source data**

The data collected for this social research publication:

- are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics
- are available via an alternative route
- may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact [socialresearch@gov.scot](mailto:socialresearch@gov.scot) for further information.
- cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.



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This document is also available from our website at [www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot).  
ISBN: 978-1-83601-032-6

The Scottish Government  
St Andrew's House  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

Produced for  
the Scottish Government  
by APS Group Scotland  
PPDAS1429494 (03/24)  
Published by  
the Scottish Government,  
March 2024



Social Research series  
ISSN 2045-6964  
ISBN 978-1-83601-032-6

Web Publication  
[www.gov.scot/socialresearch](http://www.gov.scot/socialresearch)

PPDAS1429494 (03/24)